



GOD, MODALITY, AND MORALITY

WILLIAM E. MANN

God, Modality, and Morality

God, Modality, and Morality

WILLIAM E. MANN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by
Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

© Oxford University Press 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, by license, or under terms agreed with the
appropriate reproduction rights organization. Inquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Mann, William E., 1940–
[Essays. Selections]
God, modality, and morality / William E. Mann.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 978–0–19–937076–4 (cloth : alk. paper) 1. Philosophical theology.
2. God (Christianity) I. Title.
BT40.M365 2015
212—dc23
2014032964

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments vii

Permissions viii

Introduction 1

SECTION I: GOD

1. The Divine Attributes 5

2. Divine Simplicity 20

3. Simplicity and Immutability in God 44

4. Immutability and Predication What Aristotle Taught Philo
and Augustine 57

5. Epistemology Supernaturalized 73

6. Divine Sovereignty and Aseity 95

7. Omnipresence, Hiddenness, and Mysticism 119

SECTION II: MODALITY

- 8. Necessity 145
- 9. Modality, Morality, and God 153
- 10. God's Freedom, Human Freedom, and God's Responsibility
for Sin 170
- 11. The Best of All Possible Worlds 196

SECTION III: MORALITY

- 12. Theism and the Foundations of Ethics 227
- 13. The Metaphysics of Divine Love 251
- 14. Jephthah's Plight *Moral Dilemmas and Theism* 269
- 15. The Guilty Mind 296
- 16. Piety Lending a Hand to Euthyphro 316
- 17. Hope 336
- Index* 363

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thinking about these issues has been encouraged and stimulated through the years by several people generous with their time and advice. I owe so much to Steven M. Cahn, David Christensen, Terence Cuneo, Alfred J. Freddoso, Hilary Kornblith, Norman Kretzmann, Scott MacDonald, Gareth B. Matthews, Thomas V. Morris, Derk Pereboom, Alvin Plantinga, Philip L. Quinn, and Eleonore Stump. The mistakes are my own. I thank the University of Vermont for helping to defray expenses in the production of this volume.

PERMISSIONS

- “The Divine Attributes” (Chapter 1) originally appeared in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12, 1975: 151–159. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Divine Simplicity” (Chapter 2) originally appeared in *Religious Studies* 18, 1982: 451–471. (© 1982 by Cambridge University Press.) Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Simplicity and Immutability in God” (Chapter 3) originally appeared in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23, 1983: 267–276. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Immutability and Predication: What Aristotle Taught Philo and Augustine” (Chapter 4) is reprinted with kind permission from Springer Science + Business Media from *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 22, 1987: 21–39.
- “Epistemology Supernaturalized” (Chapter 5) originally appeared in *Faith and Philosophy* 2, 1985: 436–456. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Divine Sovereignty and Aseity” (Chapter 6) originally appeared in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 35–58. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Omnipresence, Hiddenness, and Mysticism” (Chapter 7) was written for this volume.
- “Necessity” (Chapter 8) originally appeared in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, second edition, ed. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 285–291. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Modality, Morality, and God” (Chapter 9) originally appeared in *Noûs* 23, 1989: 83–99. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

- “God’s Freedom, Human Freedom, and God’s Responsibility for Sin” (Chapter 10) originally appeared in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, 182–210. Copyright © 1988 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.
- “The Best of All Possible Worlds” (Chapter 11) originally appeared in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald, 250–277. Copyright © 1991 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.
- “Theism and the Foundations of Ethics” (Chapter 12) originally appeared in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William E. Mann (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 283–304. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “The Metaphysics of Divine Love” (Chapter 13) originally appeared in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2009), 60–75. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Jephthah’s Plight: Moral Dilemmas and Theism” (Chapter 14) originally appeared in *Philosophical Perspectives* 5, 1991: 617–647. Reprinted by permission of Ridgeview Publishing Company.
- “The Guilty Mind” (Chapter 15) originally appeared in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 1, 2009: 41–63. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Piety: Lending a Hand to Euthyphro” (Chapter 16) originally appeared in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58, 1998: 123–142. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- “Hope” (Chapter 17) originally appeared in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump, 251–280. Copyright © 1993 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

God, Modality, and Morality

Introduction

This collection of essays represents my thinking about a connected series of issues in philosophical theology. By reflecting on the question “What differences would God’s existence make to the world and its inhabitants?” one can come to see how the issues are connected. The differences that I explore in answer to the question are chiefly metaphysical and moral. Many of the chapters explore themes and arguments initially developed by such historical figures as Augustine, Philo, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, Martin Luther, René Descartes, and Gottfried Leibniz. I am not prone, however, to philosophical veneration: the themes and arguments must pass contemporary muster.

The first order of business is to provide an account of God’s nature that is philosophically defensible and adequate to the conception of deity found in the Abrahamic religions. The account that I offer maintains that God, unlike all other beings, is perfect and simple. Perfection entails that God is essentially immutable, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good, a conscious sovereign and caring personal being who has no equals, flaws, or weaknesses. Simplicity entails that God has no physical or metaphysical parts, temporal stages, or properties. Philosophical critics may have doubts about the tenability of this account, both as a matter of logical plausibility and as a matter of religious accuracy. It would be rash of me to claim to quell all reasonable doubts. But I believe that several of them are dispelled in the chapters that follow, and I am eager to entertain new doubts.

The second order of business is to account for the relationship between God and the world’s inhabitants. At its most basic level, that relationship is between *creator* and *creatures*, a relationship of radical dependency that stands in need of explication. I argue for the theses that everything that is not God is brought into existence *ex nihilo* by God and is conserved in its existence by God for as long as it exists. God’s sovereignty is, on the view I hold, what makes all true propositions true. This view must have answers for three critical questions. First, if God is somehow

responsible for the truth of all contingent propositions, can the view accommodate human freedom, and if so, how? I argue that on any reasonable conception of human freedom, there is no conflict between divine sovereignty and freedom. Second, what is the status of necessary truths: are they independent of God's sovereignty? On this issue, I reject Platonism and present a quasi-Augustinian account according to which necessary truths are dependent on God. I argue for a deep analogy between the establishment of necessary truths and the promulgation of basic moral principles. I argue for a kind of divine voluntarism in both cases, although it is a voluntarism informed by a consequence of divine simplicity; namely, that there is no real distinction between God's reason and God's will.

Third, if it is contingently true that this world exists, then God could have created a different world or omitted to create altogether. Why, then, did God create this world? I maintain, notably against Leibniz, that we have no reason to believe that this world is the best possible or, indeed, that any world could be best. Nevertheless, God's loving nature provides reason for God to create something. I suggest that God's creative choice might be a rational exercise in sacrificing, adapting the world and its contents to the capacities of its creatures.

Any position that attempts to provide a theistic foundation for morality must respond to Euthyphro's dilemma, one of whose versions begins with the question "Is what is right, right, because God commands it, or does God command what is right because it is right?" I choose the first alternative, arguing that no untoward consequences follow. At the same time I defend the view that God's commands need not provide a decisive, right answer in every choice situation: on some occasions innocent agents may find themselves confronted with irresolvable moral dilemmas.

God's perfection makes the gap between God and radically dependent creatures well-nigh infinite. One may reasonably balk at the claim that an utterly self-sufficient God could have a reason for caring about creatures. And one may wonder how creatures are supposed to respond to that care even if it does exist. Scripture commands that we love God and our neighbors. I deal with the objection that love cannot be commanded and examine the ways in which there can be loving relationships among partners of unequal status. The emphasis on love as a fundamental moral concept leads to a concomitant emphasis on the motivational and intentional states of mind of the agent. It should make a moral difference, for instance, whether one performs an action out of charity or from vainglory. Emphasis on the moral disposition of an agent's mind leads in turn to a consideration of virtues specific to a particular religious tradition. I conclude by examining two such theological virtues; namely, piety and hope.

SECTION I

GOD

The Divine Attributes

GOD has traditionally been characterized as perfect and supreme, the *ens realissimum*; as Anselm would have it, God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. In the halcyon days of our philosophical forefathers, all sorts of proofs were trotted out to show that God exists. Only a few philosophers, notably Leibniz, felt an obligation to try to show that the concept of God was a coherent one, so that at least we could be certain that it was possible for Him to exist. Leibniz's effort consisted, in the main, in arguing that all of God's attributes are logically compatible, and philosophers in our own day have worried about the same issue.¹ But there are other ways in which a concept can be incoherent, and in this chapter I want to explore one of them.

The concept of the greatest positive integer is an incoherent one; it necessarily applies to nothing. For any positive integer, no matter how large, there is another larger integer, *ad infinitum*. Now suppose someone alleges that there is no perfect or supreme being, no being than which nothing greater can be conceived, not because of any logical incompatibility between the various divine attributes, but for the same reason that there is no greatest positive integer. Suppose, that is, that someone says that for any conceivable being, no matter how great, there is always a greater conceivable being, without end. Thus, descriptive phrases like "the supreme being," "the greatest conceivable being," and "the *ens realissimum*" are logically defective, he would maintain, in the same way that "the greatest positive integer" is logically defective.

C. D. Broad noticed the problem in the course of a discussion of the ontological argument. The phrase "most perfect being," he noted, has a "positive interpretation," according to which it is equivalent to "a being which has all

¹ For example, is God's immutability compatible with His omniscience? See Norman Kretzmann, "Omniscience and Immutability," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 63 (1966), pp. 409–421, for an argument in the negative. Is God's omnipotence compatible with His impeccability? See Nelson Pike, "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 6 (1969), pp. 208–216, for an argument in the affirmative.

positive powers and qualities to the highest possible degree.” This phrase will be “meaningless verbiage,” he said,

unless there is some *intrinsic* maximum or upper limit to the possible intensity of every positive property which is capable of degrees. With some magnitudes this condition is fulfilled. It is, e.g., logically impossible that any proper fraction should exceed the ratio 1/1; and again, on a certain definition of “angle,” it is logically impossible for any angle to exceed four right angles. But it seems quite clear that there are other positive properties, such as length or temperature or pain, to which there is no intrinsic maximum or upper limit of degree.²

Of course Broad has overstated his case. No one would seriously maintain that God must possess *all* positive properties, especially if length, temperature, and pain count as positive properties. But the problem Broad points out can be restated in a suitably circumspect fashion, and it should be obvious that it is a problem that transcends any parochial interest in a particular proof for the existence of God. But can the problem be met, and if so, how? In this chapter I hope to sketch a possible answer. I shall begin by pointing out some features about properties. I shall then use those features to discuss three of the divine attributes—knowledge, power, and benevolence. My argument will be that there is nothing about those three attributes which lends any aid or comfort to the problem.

I

Some properties have no degrees; they do not admit of more or less. For such a degreeless property, *F*, it makes no literal sense to say of two individuals, *x* and *y*, both of which are *F*, that *x* is more (less) *F* than *y*. Examples of degreeless properties are being a human being, being an aardvark, being a parent, being on fire, being triangular, being pregnant, being less than or equal to 1. Other properties do have degrees, however: for any one of them, *G*, it does make literal sense to say of *x* and *y*, both of which are *G*, that *x* is more (less) *G* than *y*. Let us call such properties *degreed properties*. Examples of degreed properties are being old, being angry, being cloudy, being to the left of *z*, being sick, being squarelike (not being quadrilateral), being close to delivery.

² C. D. Broad, “Arguments for the Existence of God,” in C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research* (London, 1953), pp. 179–180.

There are several distinctions worth making within the class of degreed properties, but only one interests me presently. Employing the terminology used by Broad, we may note that some degreed properties have no *intrinsic maximum* and other degreed properties do have an intrinsic maximum. We may define the notion of an intrinsic maximum as follows: degreed property *F* has an intrinsic maximum if and only if there is some possible being, *x*, such that *x* is *F*, and for any other possible being, *y*, if *y* is *F*, then it is not the case that *y* is more *F* than *x*. The degreed property of being cloudy presumably has an intrinsic maximum—when the sky is completely cloudy. Similarly, the degreed property of being squarelike has an intrinsic maximum, for nothing is more squarelike than a square. But the degreed property of having numerical magnitude does not have an intrinsic maximum.

Now, associated with the concept of God is a cluster of degreed properties which contribute to God's greatness, properties which it is necessary for God to have, and to have to a superlative degree, in order for Him to be that than which nothing greater can be conceived. We can thus reformulate the problem. In order to show that the concept of the greatest conceivable being is incoherent in the way that the concept of the greatest positive integer is incoherent, it will be sufficient to show that at least one of the degreed properties that contributes essentially to the greatness of God has no intrinsic maximum. Conversely, in order to defend the coherence of the concept of God, it will be necessary for one to show that any degreed property that contributes essentially to the greatness of God has an intrinsic maximum.³ God has traditionally been regarded as essentially omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good. Here surely are three test cases. Are these divine attributes the intrinsic maxima of being knowledgeable, being powerful, and being benevolent, or do they rather signify the absence of intrinsic maxima?

³ There is actually an alternative which I shall not explore here. One could acknowledge that some of the degreed properties that contribute to God's greatness do not have intrinsic maxima but that, nevertheless, it is logically impossible for God to possess them beyond a certain degree while at the same time possessing certain other divine attributes. I can imagine someone arguing, for example, that although mercy has no intrinsic maximum, God could not be infinitely merciful anyway, consistently with His being just. (I do not know whether this is a *good* argument—indeed, I suspect that it is a bad one—but I can imagine someone being persuaded by it.) To pursue this line of thought would be in effect to ask whether some of the divine attributes have *extrinsic maxima* (my invention, not Broad's). We might say that degreed property *F* has an extrinsic maximum relative to (degreed or degreeless) property *G* if and only if there is some possible being, *x*, such that *x* is *G* and *x* is *F* to some degree, for any other possible being, *y*, if *y* is *G*, then it is not the case that *y* is more *F* than *x*, and there is some possible being, *z*, such that *z* is more *F* than *x*. I suspect that if it turned out that one of the degreed divine attributes had an extrinsic maximum vis-à-vis one of the others, Broad would claim that the phrase "most perfect being" was "meaningless verbiage."

II

Let us begin by considering the case of the degreed property of being knowledgeable, and let us confine ourselves to propositional knowledge, or “knowledge-that.” It will have an intrinsic maximum just in case there is a possible being, x , such that x is knowledgeable, and for any other possible being, y , if y is knowledgeable, then it is not the case that y is more knowledgeable than x . Now suppose that there is no set $\{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n\}$ of true propositions such that it is logically impossible for some being to know that p_1 and that p_2 and \dots and that p_n . Call this the “Principle of Epistemic Compossibility.”⁴ Its limiting case occurs when the set contains only one true proposition: the Principle of Epistemic Compossibility has as a corollary the principle that there is no true proposition which (logically) cannot be known by someone. If the Principle of Epistemic Compossibility is true, then we can define the notion of being knowledgeable to the intrinsically maximal degree as follows: x is knowledgeable to the intrinsically maximal degree if and only if for all propositions, p , if p , then x knows that p .⁵ The intrinsic maximum of being knowledgeable is realized, in other words, by a being who knows all there is to know, provided that we assume that the Principle of Epistemic Compossibility is true. The intrinsic maximum of being knowledgeable, in yet other words, is omniscience.

But perhaps it is not yet clear that the property of being knowledgeable really has an intrinsic maximum. I wish to make two remarks that may help. First, the degreed property of having numerical magnitude has no intrinsic maximum, and one indication of this fact may be that there is no obvious way of characterizing the alleged intrinsic maximum of having numerical magnitude without using the comparative form of the phrase “has numerical

⁴ Suppose that p_1 is true, and suppose it is also true that $\sim Kap_1$, that is, that a does not know that p_1 . Then it is logically impossible, of course, for a to know that p_1 and to know that he does not know that p_1 . So the set of true propositions $\{p_1, \sim Kap_1\}$ is such that it is logically impossible for a to know them both. (I am indebted to Stephen Rosenbaum for this example.) But b can know both of them ($b \neq a$), so the case is not a counterexample to the Principle of Epistemic Compossibility.

⁵ For some philosophers, this definition will be unacceptable. For by contraposition, if it is not the case that x knows p , then it is not the case that p . But since “if p , then x knows that p ” is a schema, one family of instances of it is “if it is not the case that p , then x knows that it is not the case that p .” Thus, if it is not the case that x knows that p , then x knows that it is not the case that p . But this seems to imply that no proposition can be truth-valueless. But some philosophers (myself included) would not like to see that question begged. To satisfy that desire, we can make our definition somewhat more complex: x is knowledgeable to the ultimate degree if and only if for all propositions, p , if p is true, then x knows that p is true; if p is false, then x knows that p is false; and if p is neither true nor false, then x knows that p is neither true nor false. But we can ignore the additional complexity for the purposes of this chapter.

magnitude.” We can say, that is, that a number, n , has the intrinsic maximum of numerical magnitude if and only if for every number, m , it is not the case that m has a greater numerical magnitude than n . But the point is that we cannot specify in some *independent* way what it would be for n to have the intrinsic maximum of numerical magnitude. In the case of being knowledgeable, however, we can specify the intrinsic maximum without using the comparative phrase “knows more than.” We can say not only that an omniscient being is not surpassed in knowledge by any other being but also that an omniscient being knows the truth-values of all propositions. And the latter way of speaking does not involve reference to other knowledgeable beings taken in comparison: all it requires is that we be able to quantify over propositions. I admit that the disparity I have just pointed out between being knowledgeable and having numerical magnitude may be accidental, but I am inclined to regard it as more than that.⁶

Second, someone might balk at the idea of there being an intrinsic maximum to the property of being knowledgeable on the grounds that there is an infinite number of propositions which an omniscient being would know. This surely provides the warrant for saying that God’s knowledge is unlimited, and if it is unlimited, our antagonist will continue, then there must be no intrinsic maximum to the property of being knowledgeable.

This line of reasoning rests on a mistake. It is true that an omniscient being would know infinitely many propositions and would be unlimited in that sense, but it does not follow that the property of being knowledgeable has no intrinsic maximum. Indeed, there may be infinitely many degrees to the property of being knowledgeable—this seems reasonable to assume given that there are infinitely many propositions and given the usual opacity problems with “ x knows that p ”—and yet the property would still have an intrinsic maximum. A degreed property can have both infinitely many degrees and an intrinsic maximum, and once that is seen to be the case, then my antagonist’s argument collapses. The best way to show that a degreed property can have infinitely many degrees and an intrinsic maximum is to adduce a specimen other than the property of being knowledgeable. Consider the property of

⁶ After having written the preceding paragraphs, I found another philosopher who shared my intuitions. David Sanford writes: “A superlative term should be suspected of not being truly predicable of anything possible unless there is a reason to think otherwise, and such a reason is not provided by the fact that the superlative term can be defined by a perfectly understandable comparative term. Such a reason is sometimes provided when the superlative term can be defined without using any corresponding comparative or superlative terms. Definitions of this sort will usually, perhaps always, employ a universal quantifier.” David Sanford, “Degrees of Perfection, Argument for the Existence of God,” in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, 1967), vol. II, p. 325.

being gullible. The intrinsic maximum of gullibility is attained by a person who is disposed to believe anything anyone ever tells him.⁷ Nevertheless, the property of being gullible has infinitely many degrees short of the intrinsic maximum. There is, for example, the possible person, x , who is disposed to believe anything that anyone except Jones tells him and who is disposed to believe anything that Jones tells him except at 12:48 p.m. CST, April 16, 1973. And there is the possible person, y , who is just as gullible as x except that y in addition harbors doubts about what Smith tells him at 12:48 just in case what Smith tells him has the word “aardvark” in it. And so on. The property of being gullible, then, is a property which has infinitely many degrees but which also has an intrinsic maximum. It is evident that the property of being knowledgeable also has these features.

To sum up: the degreed property of being knowledgeable, unlike the degreed property of having numerical magnitude, has an intrinsic maximum—omniscience. Thus it is not possible that there is a being more knowledgeable than any given possible being, for if the Principle of Epistemic Compossibility is true, at least one of the given possible beings knows the truth-values of all propositions, or knows all there is to know.

III

When we turn to the case of power, things get a bit stickier. If the remarks made above were correct, we could feel confident if we could specify the intrinsic maximum of being powerful without using the phrase “is more powerful than” or any other phrase jury-rigged from it. We should like to be able to say, that is, what it is to be ultimately powerful without simply making the comparative judgment that nothing could be more powerful than an ultimately powerful being. And it is tempting to think that a definition of the intrinsic maximum of power, or omnipotence, would involve us in quantifying over all the kinds of states of affairs that can be brought about or all the kinds of actions that can be performed. But Alvin Plantinga, James Cargile, James F. Ross, and P. T. Geach have produced a budget of paradoxes to confound the sanguine omnipotence-definer,⁸ although the morals these four draw from the

⁷ Such a person is not a psychological, let alone a logical, impossibility. There is no mystery, alas, about our ability to hold inconsistent beliefs, as long as we are not aware that they are inconsistent. Perhaps all our supergullible person needs is a very short memory.

⁸ See Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY, 1967), pp. 169–170; James Cargile, “On Omnipotence,” *Nous*, vol. 1 (1967), pp. 201–205; James F. Ross, *Philosophical Theology* (Indianapolis, 1969), pp. 195–221; and P. T. Geach, “Omnipotence,” *Philosophy*, vol. 48 (1973), pp. 7–20.

difficulties are not all the same. Perhaps one can construct a definition of omnipotence in terms of all and only the kinds of states of affairs that an omnipotent being can bring about, but I suspect that it would be a very complex definition indeed. Short of having such a definition, however, I can still make it plausible to believe that the degreed property of being powerful has an intrinsic maximum. For if we were tempted to think that it does not have an intrinsic maximum, it might be for reasons like the following.

I suppose that we are all familiar with the so-called Paradox of the Stone. It can be framed in the form of a destructive dilemma whose conclusion is that neither God, nor anyone else for that matter, could be omnipotent: if God is omnipotent, then either He can create a stone so heavy He cannot move it, or He cannot. If He can, then there is some conceivable task He cannot perform—namely, move the stone in question. If He cannot, then again there is some conceivable task He cannot perform—create such a stone. In neither case, then, can God be omnipotent. Now an ingenious—and I think correct—way of dissipating the paradox appears to have been first hinted at by George Mavrodes and developed more fully by Wade Savage.⁹ Their approach is to argue that the proposition that God cannot create a stone He cannot move is true, but that it does not specify a task that God cannot perform. It is, rather, the logical consequence of two other propositions—that God can create stones of any poundage and that God can move stones of any poundage. And we would expect these two propositions to be entailed by the proposition that God is omnipotent. Hence, if God is omnipotent, He cannot create a stone He cannot move, but this imposes no limitations on His stone-creating and stone-moving powers; on the contrary, it is a consequence of there being no limits to the poundage of stones He can create and move.

If we are inclined to think that God can create and move stones of any poundage, then we may also be inclined to think that the degreed property of being powerful has no intrinsic maximum. But the Mavrodes-Savage solution to the Paradox of the Stone does not imply that conclusion. It does imply that the degreed property of being powerful has infinitely many degrees, which seems unexceptionable. There are, for example, possible beings who can move objects weighing one pound or less, possible beings who can move objects weighing one pound one ounce or less, *ad infinitum*. The Mavrodes-Savage solution does rely on the propositions that God, as an omnipotent being, can create stones of *any* poundage and move stones of *any* poundage, but these two propositions *do* specify an intrinsic maximum of power with respect to stones:

⁹ George I. Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 72 (1963), pp. 221–223; C. Wade Savage, "The Paradox of the Stone," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 76 (1967), pp. 74–79.

no being *could* do more than that with regard to creating and moving stones. So the Mavrodes-Savage solution shows that the degreed property of being powerful has infinitely many degrees and supports the claim that the property has an intrinsic maximum. Even though we may lack, then, an adequate general definition of the concept of omnipotence, it still seems reasonable to believe that there is an intrinsic maximum to the property of being powerful. Here then is another of the divine attributes which appears to lend no support to the claim that the concept of a supreme being is incoherent.

IV

God is said to be perfectly good, but that characterization begs for clarification. In general, when an agent is said to be good, it is appropriate to ask—in what respect? The question is appropriate even when we are confining ourselves to moral goodness, for to say that a particular person is morally good is not to point to some unique feature of him which all other morally good persons must also possess, but it is to say that he displays some—perhaps many—traits of character that are regarded as laudable. Benevolence, fairness, mercifulness, and honesty are examples of such traits. I certainly will not be able to treat all these traits with respect to the goodness of God, but I want to focus on one that surely raises problems with regard to the question whether all the properties of God which contribute essentially to His greatness have intrinsic maxima. That is the trait of benevolence, which we can associate with the degreed property of being benevolent. Does the degreed property of being benevolent have an intrinsic maximum or not?

To be benevolent is to be disposed to help others to attain happiness, to take an active interest in the welfare of others, even if so acting involves personal sacrifice. The last point is crucially important: in order that we be justified in calling a person benevolent, we must have some reason to think that the person is willing to have his own lot diminished, at least to some extent, if that would enhance the lots of others.¹⁰

I wish to give some account of the notion of benevolence, and toward that end, I shall begin by introducing a concept that is familiar to decision theorists. Let us suppose that it is in Waldo's power to provide goods for three people, Cudworth, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury, and let us suppose further that for some reason or other, there are only three ways, or schemes, in which

¹⁰ If you are inclined to say that the notion of self-sacrifice is not at all involved in the concept of benevolence, then I give you the word "benevolence." Whenever I use "benevolence," you should understand me to be talking about something else, call it "benevolence +."

Waldo can provide these goods. On scheme 1, Waldo can provide Cudworth, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury with three units of goods apiece. On scheme 2, Cudworth and Hutcheson get three units and Shaftesbury gets four. And on scheme 3, Cudworth gets three units, Hutcheson two units, and Shaftesbury four units. That is, we have:

	S_1	S_2	S_3
Cudworth	3	3	3
Hutcheson	3	3	2
Shaftesbury	3	4	4

Whatever else we may wish to say about the comparative merits of these three schemes, the following is true: S_2 is a *Pareto-improvement* over both S_1 and S_3 , but neither S_1 nor S_3 is a Pareto-improvement over the other.¹¹ Let us understand “intrinsic goods” to include all those things which beings value as things that are good in themselves. Not only such things as transitory feelings of elation but also such things as happiness, friendship, freedom, and God’s grace may thus count. Then we may define more precisely the notion of a Pareto-improvement. Scheme S_1 for the realization and distribution of intrinsic goods is a Pareto-improvement over scheme S_2 just in case no individual in S_1 has a lesser magnitude of intrinsic goods than he has in S_2 . Note that as defined, the dyadic relation denoted by “is a Pareto-improvement over” is reflexive, antisymmetric, transitive, and not connected in the set of schemes.

Now the Pareto criterion has been used hitherto to examine alternative schemes for the distribution and redistribution of goods in the actual world or some fragment of the actual world, and as such, it has generally been regarded as a necessary¹² condition of rational choice. Suppose, however, that we try to extend the notion to make comparative judgments between possible worlds.¹³ One natural way to do this would be as follows: possible world W is

¹¹ See Nicholas Rescher, *Distributive Justice* (Indianapolis, 1966), p. 13; and Amartya K. Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (San Francisco, 1970), p. 21, for slightly different characterizations.

¹² But not sufficient. See Rescher, *Distributive Justice*, pp. 13–14; Sen, *Collective Choice*, pp. 21–27; and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 66–72, for a discussion of the inadequacies of the Pareto criterion as a sufficient condition for rational choice. See also Sen, *Collective Choice*, pp. 83–88, 196–200, for further interesting remarks.

¹³ I shall not tarry to discuss the notion of a “possible world.” See the references in G. E. Hughes and M. J. Cresswell, *An Introduction to Modal Logic* (London, 1968), for its use in the semantics for quantified modal logic; also, Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, 1974).

a Pareto-improvement over W' if and only if no individual in W has a lesser magnitude of intrinsic goods than he has in W' .¹⁴

So defined, the Pareto criterion would have something to say about many pairs of possible worlds, but it also has some less desirable results. To cite two examples: let W be a possible world whose only two individuals are Cudworth and Hutcheson, and W' be a possible world inhabited by Cudworth, Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, and Stillingfleet. Let the distribution of goods be as follows:

	W	W'
Cudworth	10	10
Hutcheson	11	10
Shaftesbury	—	20
Stillingfleet	—	20

In terms of our definition, we shall have to say that W is a Pareto-improvement over W' . Worse yet, consider the following, where negative numbers stand for units of illfare (intrinsic evils):

	W	W'
Cudworth	10	10
Hutcheson	11	10
Shaftesbury	-10	—
Stillingfleet	-10	—

Here again we shall have to say that W is a Pareto-improvement over W' . But in neither of these cases is it obvious that the rational choice is W over W' .

These examples reflect two major problems with the Pareto criterion when it is extended to possible worlds. First, when the criterion is applied in actual world cases, it is assumed that exactly the same individuals appear in both schemes. The denizens of possible worlds, however, vary. Second, as the Pareto criterion is standardly employed, a necessary condition of one scheme's being a Pareto-improvement over another is that the number representing the sum of the intrinsic goods and evils of the first must be equal to or greater than the number representing the sum of the intrinsic goods and evils of the second (the sum of the absolute values of the intrinsic evils being subtracted from the sum of the intrinsic goods). But as both our examples show, this property is not preserved when the Pareto criterion is applied to possible worlds.

¹⁴ If the reader has philosophical scruples against the idea that one individual can exist in many possible worlds, then he may replace "he" with "his counterpart."

I think we must abandon a strict version of the Pareto criterion when it comes to comparing possible worlds, but something somewhat analogous to it can be used with more success. Let me introduce the notion of a *value structure* of a possible world. A value structure V of a possible world W is just the set of bundles in W . A *bundle* is just the aggregate of intrinsic goods and evils which a particular individual in W has. We shall assume that a bundle can be represented by some positive or negative integer, which is the sum of the numbers representing the individual intrinsic goods and evils in the bundle. Since a value structure is just a set of bundles, it makes no difference to whom the bundles are assigned. In other words, in the following three worlds,

	W	W'	W^*
Cudworth	5	7	5
Hutcheson	7	5	5
Shaftesbury	5	5	7

the value structures are identical. To put it yet another way, the value structures of two possible worlds are identical when and only when the histograms of their bundles are identical.¹⁵

I shall now propose a principle for determining when one possible world is an improvement over another. It has, as we shall see, some of the properties of the Pareto criterion, but it is designed to apply to possible worlds. For obvious reasons, we should call it, then, the *Bruno criterion*: W is a Bruno-improvement over W' if and only if for each individual bundle, b_k , in the value structure V' of W' there is a distinct bundle, b_j , in V of W such that b_j is equal to or greater than b_k , and if W has more individuals in it than W' , all the bundles in V not correlated by the above procedure with bundles in V' are such that they contain a sufficient quantity of intrinsic goods on balance relative to W so that it is not the case that it would have been better for the individuals having these bundles had they never existed.

It should be noted that the Bruno criterion differs from the Pareto criterion in that it allows for variations in the populations being compared. It also allows some possible worlds to be Bruno-improvements over others even though they would not be Pareto-improvements. For example, in the following case,

	W	W'
Cudworth	6	7
Hutcheson	8	8
Shaftesbury	8	5

¹⁵ I am indebted to P. T. Geach for this suggestion.

W is a Bruno-improvement but not a Pareto-improvement over W' . (However, any Pareto-improvement is a Bruno-improvement.) But there are similarities between the two criteria. The dyadic relation denoted by “is a Bruno-improvement over” is reflexive, antisymmetric, transitive, and not connected in the set of possible worlds. And it is a necessary condition for one possible world to be a Bruno-improvement over another that the number representing the sum of the bundles of the first must be equal to or greater than the number representing the sum of the bundles of the second.

V

With the notion of a Bruno-improvement under our belts, we can now proceed to examine two candidates for the definition of omnibenevolence. The first is one that for obvious reasons we could call a utilitarian conception; the second we could call a supererogatory conception.

- (I) x is benevolent to the intrinsically maximal degree if and only if for any possible worlds, W and W' , if x believes that W is a Bruno-improvement over W' , then x prefers to see W actualized over W' , and if x believes that except for his own case, W is a Bruno-improvement over W' , then x prefers to see W actualized over W' , provided that x believes that the absolute magnitude of the increase of intrinsic goods to others in W as compared to W' exceeds the absolute magnitude of the decrease of intrinsic goods to x in W as compared to W' .
- (II) x is benevolent to the intrinsically maximal degree if and only if for any possible worlds, W and W' , if x believes that W is a Bruno-improvement over W' , then x prefers to see W actualized over W' , and if x believes that except for his own case, W is a Bruno-improvement over W' , then x prefers to see W actualized over W' , no matter how much the loss of intrinsic goods to x is in W as compared to W' .

There could, of course, be conceptions of omnibenevolence which lie somewhere between (I) and (II). For our purposes, not much hangs on which of these definitions we ought to accept, for the real question may be whether either of them, or anything between them, is acceptable as a characterization of the omnibenevolence of God. The remarks I wish to make in clarification and defense are relevant to both (I) and (II). First of all, neither (I) nor (II) tells us what an omnibenevolent being would prefer if there were two or more possible worlds such that no possible world were a Bruno-improvement over

them. If this were the case and if x preferred one of the worlds over the other(s), then the grounds for x 's preference would have to be other than benevolence. One such world, for example, might consist of a more just distribution of intrinsic goods than the other(s).

Second, a being could be omnibenevolent, in either of the senses defined, but prefer not to see W , a Bruno-improvement over W' , actualized, because of other moral qualities that that being possesses. Robert Merrihew Adams has recently suggested, for example, that if one of God's other moral qualities is *grace*, then it need not follow that He would prefer to actualize W over W' .¹⁶ Now someone might complain that in the case of God, it could not happen that He would choose to actualize W' over W when He knows that W is a Bruno-improvement over W' and when He is omnibenevolent in either of the senses defined, for that would be tantamount to saying that one of His preferences—namely, for W over W' —would be frustrated. And surely an omnipotent being's preferences, if they are logically coherent at all, cannot be frustrated.

However, the argument rests on a misconception. Let us suppose that there are two possible worlds, W and W' , such that in terms of omnibenevolence, God prefers W to W' , and in terms of justice, God prefers W' to W . It does not appear to me that even if this were the case, that it would be the cause of any sort of frustration or the indication of any sort of limitation on the part of God. For if W and W' are two distinct worlds and if God must choose between them, then the "must" here is the "must" of logical necessity. If it were logically possible for God to combine those features which make W preferable to W' in terms of omnibenevolence and which make W' preferable to W in terms of justice, then it seems that God would prefer such a combined possible world to either W or W' , and our problem would cease to be an interesting one. So for the problem to be an interesting one, it must be logically impossible for God to combine both features. But then it is hard to see how the logically impossible is supposed to be a source of frustration or limitation to God, especially when, as an omniscient being, He would *know* what is logically impossible.

Third, both definitions leave open the question whether there is *any* upper limit to the set of possible Bruno-improvement worlds. The definitions entail neither that there is at least one possible world such that no other possible world is a Bruno-improvement over it nor that there is no such world. (We could call such a world a *Bruno-optimal* world.) Some philosophers have expressed reservations about the coherence of the phrase "the best of all possible

¹⁶ Robert Merrihew Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 81 (1972), pp. 317–332.

worlds,”¹⁷ and I suspect that they are right. But we do not need an answer one way or the other to that question to see that the notions of omnibenevolence represented in (I) and (II) are alternative intrinsic maxima of the degreed property of being benevolent. For even if there is no Bruno-optimal world, even if there is always a possible Bruno-improvement world for any given possible world, it does not follow that there is no intrinsic maximum to benevolence. All that follows in that case is that the actual world is not the best possible world, since no possible world is the best possible world. Hence, if the actual world is not the best possible world but is the creation of a rational omnibenevolent being, there must have been other factors in the creative choice of that being, factors that led to the selection of this world over other alternative worlds.¹⁸

But to repeat, the definitions of the intrinsic maximum of benevolence are unaffected by the issue whether there is a Bruno-optimal possible world. For the definitions require that for any pair-wise choice, an omnibenevolent being with correct beliefs will, *ceteris paribus*, choose a Bruno-improvement. And that requirement can be satisfied whether there is a Bruno-optimal possible world or not. If there is not, then an omniscient omnibenevolent being’s preference rankings would be open-ended, in the sense that for any given world, *W*, there will always be another world, *W'*, such that from the point of view of benevolence alone, that being would prefer *W'* to *W*. But the fact that the preference rankings would be open-ended does not entail that there is no intrinsic maximum to being benevolent, any more than the fact that there is no limit to the poundage of stones that God can move entails that there is no intrinsic maximum to being powerful. (Note that once again we have been able to produce a definition for the intrinsic maximum of a degreed property without simply using a comparative form of the predicate in the definition.)

Fourth, I suspect that some will be bothered by the second clauses of both definitions of omnibenevolence, especially when it comes to the case of God. For how could God, the Perfect Good, suffer a decrease in intrinsic goods, or how could His lot be made worse? If one is inclined to think that an all-perfect being cannot (logically) be subject to these liabilities, then one will regard the second clauses of both definitions as applying vacuously in the case where *x* is God. But the reason they apply vacuously is presumably because of *other* properties of God, perhaps His omnipotence or His alleged immutability. One can

¹⁷ See Keith E. Yandell, *Basic Issues in the Philosophy of Religion* (Boston, 1971), pp. 50–52; and Adams, “Must God Create,” pp. 317–318.

¹⁸ If there is no Bruno-optimal possible world, then it follows that there are possible worlds infinitely better in intrinsic goods than the actual world. That might supply the theologian with a motive for claiming that there is a Bruno-optimal possible world.

imagine an omnibenevolent being, in either of the senses defined, who had no great amount of power or immunity from suffering, and for such a being the second clauses would not apply vacuously. Hence, the fact, if it be a fact, that God's lot cannot in any way be made worse does not show that either of the definitions is defective. Moreover, it is not clear that there is any compelling reason to believe that God cannot logically choose to have His happiness diminished from what it could be. For there seems to be nothing logically contradictory in saying that an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent being can choose less happiness for himself. He might choose less happiness for himself if that were the only possible way or the morally best way to bring about a certain result. Such a being could choose a course of action, knowing that as this course of action unfolds, he will experience sorrow. But he may choose the action for the sake of some good for others which cannot or ought not to be brought about by any other means. I believe that the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and Atonement fit naturally here.

Having said what I have said about the concept of omnibenevolence as defined by either (I) or (II) and having pointed out that it is the intrinsic maximum of the degreed property of being benevolent, I shall end on a deflationary note. It seems to me that the property of omnibenevolence, which I have construed as being *one* of the attributes involved in God's perfect goodness, is not one of God's more impressive attributes. For in fact, it is possible for humans to be omnibenevolent in either sense (I) or sense (II), in a way in which it is impossible for them to be either omniscient or omnipotent. Now some may take that as a sure sign that I have not properly defined the notion of omnibenevolence. Perhaps that is so, but it seems that the principle on which that sentiment is most likely based—namely, that no human could possess one of God's great-making properties to the superlative degree—is at least as moot as my definitions of omnibenevolence. But I cannot pursue that issue further here.

I have cast about for an answer to the question whether the concept of God is logically defective in the way that the concept of the greatest positive integer is. I have argued that when three of the degreed properties which contribute essentially to God's greatness are considered, it turns out that they have intrinsic maxima. But there are many more divine attributes. Thus, the case I have tried to make in this paper is at best incomplete. But that is not all bad. For if what I have said here is correct, at least the case has not been doomed at the outset.¹⁹

¹⁹ An earlier version of this chapter was a paper read at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting in 1973. I wish to thank Larry Colter, Steven Cahn (my APA commentator), and especially Philip Quinn for much helpful criticism, and my colleague Rew Godow for reading the paper for me in Atlanta when I could not be there.

Divine Simplicity

In *The City of God*, XI, 10, St. Augustine claims that the divine nature is *simple* because “it is what it has” (*quod habet hoc est*). We may take this as a slogan for the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS), a doctrine which finds its way into orthodox medieval Christian theological speculation. Like the doctrine of God’s timeless eternity, the DDS has seemed obvious and pious to many and incoherent, misguided, and repugnant to others. Unlike the doctrine of God’s timeless eternity, the DDS has received very little critical attention. The DDS did not originate with Augustine, but I am not primarily concerned with its pedigree. Nor am I concerned to ask how the doctrine interacts with trinitarian speculation. I will have my hands full as it is. In section I of this chapter I shall provide a rough characterization of the DDS, indicate its complexity, and focus on a particular aspect of the doctrine which will exercise us in the remainder of the chapter; namely, the thesis that the divine attributes are all identical with each other and with God. In section II I shall discuss Alvin Plantinga’s recent objections to Aquinas’ version of the DDS. I shall then offer a more detailed presentation of what I take to be Aquinas’ version (section III), and recast it in terms of a theory of attributes which is significantly different from Plantinga’s (section IV). Although the recasting of the doctrine will enable me to rebut Plantinga’s objections (section V), it by no means solves all the problems of the DDS. In section VI, I shall discuss the chief lingering problem facing a defender of the DDS.

I. The Doctrine Deployed

Augustine has more to say about God’s simplicity, and it will be useful to examine these passages:

There is accordingly a good which alone is simple and for that reason is alone unchangeable, and that is God. All good things are created by this good, but [they are] not simple and for that reason [they are]

changeable. . . . For this reason, then, a nature is called simple in which it is not the case either that it has something which it could lose, or is different from that which it has; as a vessel is different from some liquid [it contains], or a body from [its] color, or air from light or heat, or a soul from wisdom. . . . Therefore, according to this those things are called simple which are pre-eminently and truly divine, in which a quality is not one thing, the substance another, nor are they divine or wise or blessed by participation in other things.¹

There are, I believe, at least three elements in Augustine's account of simplicity. (1) A simple being is immutable. It looks as though a being is simple if and only if it is immutable. Nevertheless, it also looks as though simplicity takes some kind of explanatory precedence over immutability: God is unchangeable *because* he is simple; other beings are changeable *because* they are not simple. (2) Simplicity is not an accidental feature of God. A simple being has nothing it *could* lose, including, one presumes, its simplicity. I take this to imply that a simple being has no accidental properties. (3) A simple being is nothing different from what it *has*. The ontological distinction between a substance and its qualities does not apply to a simple being. ". . . [T]he vessel is not the liquid nor the body the color nor the air the light or heat nor the soul the wisdom." A body may participate in a color, but the color is something other than the body itself. I take it that Augustine intends this point to apply to essential as well as accidental qualities, so that if a simple being has any essential qualities, those qualities are not distinct from it; they *are* it. Passages in *De Trinitate* clinch this interpretation. Orthodox Christian theologians have maintained, for example, that God is essentially good, wise, and powerful. In *De Trinitate* Augustine says:

God indeed is truly spoken of in many ways as great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatever else is seen as not unworthily said [of him]. But he is the same as his greatness (*eadem magnitudo ejus est*), which is wisdom—for he is not great by means of bulk, but by means of power—and the same as goodness, which is wisdom and greatness, and the same as truth, which is all these. And in him it is not one thing to be blessed and another to be great, or wise, or true, or to be good, or to be altogether himself.²

¹ Saint Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XI, 10. My translation is based on the text in *De Civitate Dei* Libri XI–XXII, vol. 48, of *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1955), pp. 330–331.

² Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, 7, 8. My translation is based on the text in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus* (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1861), vol. 42, p. 929.

Although the first two features of Augustine's characterization of divine simplicity raise interesting problems of their own, I want to concentrate on the third feature. It is the most distinctive and perhaps most scandalous feature of the DDS. God is his attributes, and the "is" here is the "is" of identity. The point made somewhat hazily by Augustine is put with more focus by Anselm in the *Proslogion*:

Therefore life, wisdom, and the like are not parts of You, but all of them are one, and each one of them is entirely what You are and what all the others are.³

Anselm attempts to shed more light on the DDS in the earlier *Monologion*:

For since a human being cannot be justice but can *have* justice, a human being who is just is not understood as being justice (*existens iustitia*) but as having justice (*habens iustitiam*). Thus, since the supreme nature is not properly so-called because it has justice but because it is justice, when it is called 'just' it is properly understood as being justice, but not as having justice. Wherefore, if, when it is said to be justice it is not said what *sort* of thing it is but *what* it is (*non dicitur qualis est, sed quid est*), then it follows that when it is called 'just,' it is not said what sort of thing it is, but what it is.⁴

If Jones is just, then Jones has, as one of his properties, the quality of justice, a quality which is distinct from Jones; Smith, after all, may also be just. So the analysis of the simple sentence "Jones is just" involves an inventory of at least two different things of two different ontological kinds, Jones and justice. Now although the surface structure of "God is just" is the same as that for "Jones is just," its deep structure varies radically, according to Anselm. God is not just in virtue of having justice or participating in justice, for then God's justice would be something distinct from God, as Jones' justice is something distinct from Jones. Rather, God *is* justice. Upon analysis, "God is just" transforms into "God = Justice," where the identity is a necessary identity. Coupling this result with the *Proslogion* passage, we get these further necessary identities: "God = Life," "God = Wisdom."

By this time one's philosophical hackles should be up. For some very strange consequences flow from Anselm's version of the DDS. First, if God = Justice,

³ Saint Anselm, *Proslogion*, XVIII. My translation is based on the text in Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (ed.), *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag [Günther Holzboog], 1968), Tome 1, vol. 1, pp. 114–115.

⁴ Saint Anselm, *Monologion*, XVI, in Schmitt, *S. Anselmi*, p. 30.

God = Life, and God = Wisdom, then it follows, for example, that Justice = Wisdom and that Life = Wisdom. Only committed Platonists will be happy with the first of this pair, and no one should be happy with the second. For to the extent that “Life = Wisdom” makes any sense, it implies the identity of the properties *being a living being* and *being a wise being*. But these two properties are not even extensionally equivalent, let alone identical. Second, if Jones is just by participation in Justice and if God is necessarily identical to Justice, then Jones participates in God, which sounds heretical.

Perhaps one could live with these consequences if one believed that the DDS was centrally important to theism. It is certainly fair and perhaps overdue to ask what its importance was thought to be. Anselm gives two distinct answers, one in the *Monologion*, the other in the *Proslogion*. In the *Monologion*, Anselm says:

For everything composite, in order to exist, needs those things out of which it is composed, and what it is it owes to them; since whatever it is, it is through them, and what they are, they are not through it; and therefore it is not completely supreme.⁵

If God’s justice were merely a part or a component of God, then (1) that God is just would be due to the ingredient Justice in him, and moreover, (2) the ingredient Justice would be what it is independently of God’s activity. But if that were so, then (1) God would not be what he is through himself (*per se*) but through another (*per aliud*), which violates the doctrine of God’s *aseity*. And (2) the independence of Justice from God’s activity would seem to deny his *sovereignty* over all things.⁶ One way of short-circuiting these problems is to claim that Justice is not a part or a component of God at all.

Anselm adopts a different strategy in the *Proslogion*. Recall that in the *Proslogion*, God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” But

whatever is composed of parts is not entirely one, but in a certain way is many and diverse from itself, and can be dissolved either by action or by the understanding; which is foreign to You, than Whom nothing better can be conceived.⁷

Whatever has parts, even if the “parts” be essential properties, is liable to some kind of decomposition, even if only in conception (so Anselm thinks), and

⁵ Saint Anselm, *Monologion*, XVII, in Schmitt, *S. Anselmi*, p. 31.

⁶ See Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), *passim* but esp. pp. 54, 77–80. Henceforward I shall refer to this work as “DGHN?”

⁷ Saint Anselm, *Proslogion*, XVIII, in Schmitt, *S. Anselmi*, p. 114.

thus is inferior in that respect to a being not composed of parts. Thus Anselm in the *Proslogion* regards the DDS as an entailment of the thesis that God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

There is surely some initial appeal to both Anselm's answers; they have set up resonances among the many and among the few. If they turn out to be misguided *au fond*, that would have to be shown. For present purposes I assume that there is a presumption in their favor. Yet at the same time the DDS yields the powerfully counterintuitive consequences mentioned earlier. And so we seem to have reached an *impasse*.

I wish I knew whether Aquinas was aware of the two aforementioned difficulties facing Anselm's version of the DDS. For Aquinas makes a small syntactical adjustment to the statement of the doctrine which has the effect of avoiding both of them. (As I hope to show, the alteration was [also?] dictated by other theoretical considerations.) In both the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas routinely does not say, e.g., that God is Goodness. He says rather that God is *his* goodness (*Deus est sua bonitas*).⁸ In general, Aquinas' expression of instances of the DDS takes one or the other of two forms. Let me call them, somewhat proleptically, *Deity-instance identities*, that is, identities of the form "God is his *F*-ness", and *instance-instance identities*, identities of the form "the *F*-ness of God is the *G*-ness of God." "*F*-ness" and "*G*-ness" are to be understood here as taking as their substituends not only certain appropriate abstract nouns but also the present active infinitive forms of certain appropriate verbs. To give some of the leading examples of Deity-instance identities: God is his godhead, his essence, his nature, his quiddity (SCG, I, 21: *Deus est sua essentia, quidditas, seu natura*; ST, I, 3, 3: *Deus est sua deitas*); his existence (SCG, I, 21, and ST, I, 3, 4: *Deus est suum esse*); his eternity

⁸ See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 38. Henceforward I shall refer to this work as "SCG," and to the *Summa Theologiae* as "ST." My translations from SCG are based on the Leonine text in S. *Thomae Aquinatis Summa Contra Gentiles* (Turin and Rome: Casa Editrice Marietti, 1946). For ST I am relying on the Leonine text in *Divi Thomae Aquinatis . . . Summa Theologica* (Rome: Typographia Senatus, 1886–1887).

There are occasions when Aquinas says that God is Goodness itself and Existence itself: *Est igitur ipsa bonitas, non tantum bonus. Sed Deus est ipsum esse . . .* (SCG, I, 38). I prefer to think of those occasions as lapses. They appear to drop out entirely from ST, which was written after SCG. Plantinga cites a passage from ST, I, 3, 4, which, as translated, gives the appearance of preserving the lapse: "Now God, as we have seen, exists. If then *he is not himself existence*, and thus not by nature existent, he will be a being [existent] only by participation" (DGHN?, pp. 30–31, emphasis added). The Leonine text is this: *Deus autem est sua essentia, ut ostensum est; si igitur non sit suum esse, erit ens per participationem, et non per essentiam*. "*Suum*" here clearly functions as a possessive pronoun, parallel to the "*sua*" in "*sua essentia*." Perhaps Plantinga is relying on the Blackfriars text, which elides, without justification, "*sua essentia*." A more literal translation is this: "But God is his essence, as has been shown; thus if *he is not his existence*, he will be a being by participation, and not by essence." So translated, the passage provides no evidence for the presence of the lapse.

(*ST*, I, 10, 2: *Deus . . . est sua aeternitas*): his life and his living (*SCG*, I, 98: *Deus est suum vivere et sua vita*; see also *ST*, I, 3, 3, and *ST*, I, 18, 3 *ad* 2); his truth (*SCG*, I, 60: *Deus est sua veritas*); his blessedness (*SCG*, I, 101: *Deus est sua beatitudo*). And here are the more important instance-instance identities. The understanding of God is the substance, essence, and existence of God (*ST*, I, 14, 4: . . . *intelligere Dei est ejus substantia . . . ipsum ejus intelligere est ejus essentia et ejus esse*; see also *SCG*, I, 45). The will of God is his understanding and his existence (*ST*, I, 19, 1: . . . *sicut suum intelligere est suum esse, ita et suum esse est suum velle*; see also *SCG*, I, 73). The power of God is the substance of God (*SCG*, II, 8: . . . *divina potentia est ipsa Dei substantia*). The power of God is his activity (*SCG*, II, 9: *Dei potentia est eius actio*).

Of course we would like to know what sort of thing the goodness of God is and how it is related to goodness, not to mention Goodness. But let us defer these questions until section III, and content ourselves with noting that whatever its difficulties, Aquinas' version of the DDS offers the appearance of avoiding Anselm's problems. By allowing that God = Life and that God = Wisdom, Anselm got stuck with the claim that Life = Wisdom. Nothing so untoward happens to Aquinas. God = the life of God and God = the wisdom of God, from whence it follows that the life of God = the wisdom of God, but that is not tantamount to saying that Life = Wisdom. As for Anselm's second problem, although Jones may participate in justice, it does not follow on Aquinas' view that Jones participates in God, for Aquinas does not say that God = Justice. He says instead that God = the justice of God.

II. The Doctrine Besieged

The alleged improvement over Anselm is hollow if there are some fundamental objections to Aquinas' doctrine. Alvin Plantinga has recently presented what he takes to be such objections.

There are two difficulties, one substantial and the other truly monumental. In the first place if God is identical with each of his properties, then each of his properties is identical with each of his properties, so that God has but one property. This seems flatly incompatible with the obvious fact that God has several properties; he has both power and mercifulness, say, neither of which is identical with the other. In the second place, if God is identical with each of his properties, then, since each of his properties is a property, he is a property—a self-exemplifying property. Accordingly God has just one property: himself. This view is subject to a difficulty both obvious and overwhelming.

No property could have created the world; no property could be omniscient, or, indeed, know anything at all. If God is a property, then he isn't a person but a mere abstract object; he has no knowledge, awareness, power, love or life (DGHN?, p. 47).

Plantinga recognizes that Aquinas has the resources to respond to the first objection, but the response, as Plantinga construes it, is ultimately beyond hope. As for the second objection, there is no reply to it: thus the DDS either flouts "the most fundamental claims of theism" or "scouts intuitions much firmer than those that support it" (DGHN?, pp. 54, 61). I aim to show that Plantinga is wrong on both counts. Concerning the first objection, I shall argue that Plantinga misdiagnoses Aquinas' version of the DDS. Concerning the second objection, I shall argue that there is a good deal less flouting and scouting than there first appears to be.

If God is identical not with Wisdom *simpliciter* and Power *simpliciter* but with the wisdom of God and the power of God, then, as we have seen, Aquinas has a way of sidestepping Plantinga's first objection. But, claims Plantinga, new objections ooze out once we press this Thomistic device. What kind of thing is the wisdom of God? Well, *God's being wise* is construed by Plantinga as a *state of affairs*, and, if Plantinga's Aquinas is right, it is the same state of affairs as *God's being powerful*. If God is *essentially* wise and *essentially* powerful, then *God's being wise* and *God's being powerful* are states of affairs which obtain in exactly the same possible worlds; namely, in all the worlds in which God exists. So construed, it is tempting to see this identity principle in Aquinas:

- (A) States of affairs *x's having F* and *y's having G* are identical if and only if *x's having F* is equivalent to (obtains in the same possible worlds as) *y's having G* and $x = y$ (DGHN?, p. 50).

Now if this is what Aquinas needs to make the DDS work, then there are three objections to be made. (1) For any individual, *x*, and for any two properties, *F* and *G*, essential to *x*, it turns out that *x's having F* is the same state of affairs as *x's having G*. Thus, for example, *Socrates' being a person* and *Socrates' being a nonnumber* are the same state of affairs. (2) On (A), the principle in question, it is still true that God has properties which are constitutive of his essence and which are distinct from him. Therefore the Thomistic maneuver is utterly beside the point for responding to concerns about God's sovereignty and aseity. (3) On the present construction of Aquinas' doctrine, God is a state of affairs, and "this is every bit as outrageous as the claim that God is a property" (DGHN?, pp. 51–53).

We should note that objection (2) gets its lease on life from the identity principle for states of affairs. We can buy some time for Aquinas by refusing to acquiesce to that principle, not because it is a bad principle for states of affairs—for all I know it is a fine principle—but because there is no good reason to cast Aquinas' doctrine in terms of states of affairs. As a point of syntax, we can observe that states of affairs, whatever they are, are supposed by Plantinga to be picked out by gerundive expressions like "Smith's being wise," "San Francisco's being north of Los Angeles," and the like. But as we have seen, Aquinas' version of the DDS is more naturally expressed in terms of a certain kind of definite descriptive phrase; that is, phrases of the form "the *F*-ness of God." It is less tempting to think of "the wisdom of God" as referring to a state of affairs. A more natural interpretation of the phrase is that it refers to an instance of a property, or what I shall call a *property instance*.⁹ Now property instances are assuredly not states of affairs. It is claimed by the friends of states of affairs that all states of affairs *exist*, but only some of them *obtain* or are actual.¹⁰ This feature does not hold for property instances. In order for a property instance to exist, it must be actual: some existing thing must either exemplify it or be it. (See *infra*, section V.)

"The wisdom of God," then, refers to one particular instance of wisdom, albeit a very impressive one. If we choose to characterize the property involved by the expression "*being wise*," then we can say that the wisdom of God is one instance of the property *being wise*. To put it that way allows one to say that the property instance in question is *God's being wise*, but now that gerundive expression need not be thought of as corresponding to a state of affairs. What Aquinas' version of the DDS claims is that the property instance of God's being wise is identical to the property instance of God's being powerful, etc. Whatever the difficulties of that position might be, objection (2) is simply irrelevant to it.

Still, one may think that the appropriate analogues to objections (1) and (3) are more than enough to dismiss Aquinas' DDS. The analogue to objection (1) takes as its point of departure the following principle, modeled after principle (A):

- (B) Property instances *the F-ness of x* and *the G-ness of y* are identical if and only if (1) *x* is *F* in every possible world in which *y* is *G* and conversely, and (2) *x* = *y*.

⁹ See Geach's remarks on "individualized forms" in "Aquinas," in G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pp. 79–81.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, "Actualism and possible worlds," *Theoria*, 42 (1976), 139–160; reprinted in Michael J. Loux (ed.), *The Possible and the Actual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 253–273. See esp. pp. 257–258 in Loux.

Now consider two property instances which we will assume are sported by Socrates in all the worlds in which he exists, the personhood of Socrates and the nonnumeration of Socrates. On principle (B) it follows that they are identical, which may seem counterintuitive. The refurbished objection (3) is more succinct. The DDS, à la Aquinas, entails that God is a property instance, and this entailment, if anything, seems worse than the claim that God is a property.

III. The Doctrine Redeployed, or Thomas Redux

The two objections bruited at the end of the previous section can be linked to the two different kinds of identity statements that Aquinas uses to express the DDS. The first objection arises naturally from the instance-instance identities; that is, identities of the form “the *F*-ness of God is the *G*-ness of God.” And the second objection arises naturally from any Deity-instance identity; that is, any identity of the form “God is the *F*-ness of God.”

I wish to examine the first objection first. To respond to it adequately will require that I provide an analysis of sentences of the form “the *F*-ness of God is the *G*-ness of God.” That analysis will occupy this section and section IV: hence my response to objection (1) does not appear until section V. The analysis I shall provide is built up entirely from ingredients explicitly contained in Aquinas’ writings. Nevertheless, the end result is not something that is explicitly endorsed by Aquinas (nor explicitly rejected either), and so I must admit that as a matter of exegesis, I may be wrong. I believe, however, that the analysis I come up with is interesting in its own right and is not inconsistent with anything Aquinas says.

Let us begin by adumbrating some of the main features of Aquinas’ theory of predication with respect to God. It springs basically from his epistemology. The existence of God, although *per se notum*, is not *per se notum quoad nos* (SCG, I, 11; ST, I, 2, 1). Although the terminology Aquinas chooses is not pellucid, it is clear from what he goes on to say that what he means is this. The proposition that God exists is necessarily true; indeed, it is what we would call analytic, since “the predicate is identical with the subject, for God is his existence.” Nevertheless, the proposition is not known a priori, because we have no a priori conception of God. In our natural state—that is, barring any epistemological advantage gained by a beatific vision, mystical experience, or special revelation—we cannot know the essence of God (ST, I, 12, 4 and 11). This is because all our natural knowledge must begin with the senses and can have as its domain only sensible objects (ST, I, 12, 12). Hence all our conceptual repertoire is founded on experience. Even so, our knowledge of the world and its

features is sufficient, Aquinas thinks, to show that God exists and to enable us to say something about his nature. Given certain very general features about the world we experience—for example, that some things in it are in motion or that some things are susceptible to corruption while others are not—we can infer the existence of God as unmoved mover or as *per se* necessary being (SCG, I, 13; ST, I, 2, 3).

Given other characteristics exhibited by some creatures, namely their “great-making” attributes, we can infer that these attributes must also exist in God. (Otherwise there would be no adequate explanation for the existence of these attributes in creatures.) Examples are goodness, knowledge, and power. But there is a complication. The concepts which we have of these attributes are garnered from our experience of creatures, but it would be a mistake to assume that the concepts apply in exactly the same way to God. For if God is essentially good and if our ordinary concept of goodness, based on our experience of creatures, is adequate to characterize God’s essential goodness, then we would have unaided natural knowledge of God’s essence, contrary to Aquinas’ explicit disavowals. Thus, Aquinas must say that our concept of goodness is not adequate to enable us to understand God’s goodness. “Good” predicated of God is predicated properly or literally (*proprie*); God really is good. But the mode of signification (*modus significandi*) which the predicate “good” has when applied to us is inappropriate to God (ST, I, 13, 3; see also SCG, I, 30). That is, “good” calls to mind the goodness of creatures, but it is inadequate to use the goodness of creatures as a model for understanding the goodness of God. Aquinas is fond of saying that the “perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way” (ST, I, 4, 2; see also SCG, I, 30 and ST, I, 13, 2): In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* he expatiates on what he takes this to mean:

Indeed, [the terms] which express perfections of this kind, along with the mode of supereminence by which they coincide in God, are said of God alone, such as ‘supreme good,’ ‘first being,’ and others of this kind. But the mode of supereminence with which the aforementioned perfections are found in God cannot be signified by means of names imposed by us, except either by means of negation, as when we call God ‘eternal’ or ‘infinite,’ or else by means of a relation between him and others, as when he is called ‘first cause’ or ‘supreme good’ (SCG, I, 30).

One might be tempted at this point to conjure up Aquinas’ theory of analogical predication. I shall resist the temptation. We need not broach that thorny issue to make the points I wish to make.

When we acquire our concepts of the great-making attributes, based on our experience of the sensible world, we also learn that many of the crucially important ones, such as goodness, knowledge, and power, admit of degrees. Jones and Smith may both be knowledgeable, but Jones may also be more knowledgeable than Smith. Let us say that the property of being *F* is a *degreed property* if and only if there are (actual or possible) individuals *x* and *y* such that *x* is *F*, *y* is *F*, and *x* is more *F* than *y* is. We could thus divide the class of degreed properties from the class of nondegreed properties, although we might have some doubts about particular cases. *Being heavy* and *being happy* are degreed properties; *being an ostrich* and *being mortal* are nondegreed properties. As normally understood, the properties of *being green* and *being large* are degreed properties, but perhaps the properties of *being celery leaf green* and *being larger than or equal in size to Cleveland* are not. Within the class of degreed properties we can distinguish those degreed properties which have an ultimate degree or *intrinsic maximum* from those which do not. Degreed property *F* has an intrinsic maximum if and only if there is some individual (actual or only possible), *x*, such that *x* is *F*, and for any other individual (actual or only possible), *y*, it is not the case that *y* is more *F* than *x*.¹¹ *Being large* and *being heavy* are examples of degreed properties which have no intrinsic maximum, whereas *being transparent* and *being round* are degreed properties which do have intrinsic maxima.

Our concepts of goodness, knowledgeability, and power are concepts of degreed properties, but are they concepts of degreed properties which have intrinsic maxima? I think that Aquinas' answer is and must be "yes." When it is said that God is knowledgeable, not only is it intended that he is immutably knowledgeable and essentially knowledgeable but also maximally knowledgeable. Surely if there could be a being more knowledgeable than *x*, we have all we need in order to know that *x* is not God. For purposes of the present discussion I shall assume that these crucial degreed properties do have intrinsic maxima. That is a significant assumption, but I shall not argue for it here.¹² To take two specimen cases, the intrinsic maximum of *being knowledgeable* is *omniscience* and the intrinsic maximum of *being powerful* is *omnipotence*. Now what I offer on Aquinas' behalf is this. Although the properties of *being knowledgeable* and *being powerful* are distinct properties, the properties of *being omniscient* and *being omnipotent* are not. If this is so, then we have excellent grounds for asserting that the omniscience of God = the omnipotence of God.

One may think that I am scarcely doing Aquinas a favor: in order to extricate him from an incoherency, I plunge him into an absurdity. I wish to do two

¹¹ See William E. Mann, "The divine attributes," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 12 (1975), 151–159, esp. 152. Reprinted as Chapter 1 of this volume.

¹² See Mann, "Divine attributes," for a discussion of these issues.

things to allay that sentiment. I shall briefly indicate how my interpretation jibes with Aquinas' doctrines. In the remainder of the chapter I shall argue that although the interpretation might be mistaken, it is certainly not absurd.

The bare experience of creatures does not give us the concepts of omniscience and omnipotence. Experience may tell us that Jones is more knowledgeable than Smith but it does not provide us with an example of something than which nothing more knowledgeable can be conceived. How then is the concept of omniscience acquired? The most plausible answer is that we note that the predicate "is knowledgeable" is associated with a relation, "is more knowledgeable than." We then insert a negation in that relation to get "is not more knowledgeable than," and the result, when suitably generalized, gives us the concept of omniscience: an omniscient being is a being such that no other conceivable being is more knowledgeable than it. (This in itself, of course, is not enough to guarantee that the concept is coherent, for if it were, then we could argue by parity of reasoning that the concept of omniheaviness is also coherent.) So the concept of omniscience has an empirical base, and it can be analyzed in terms of a two-place relation and its negation. Such analytical maneuvers are not precluded by Aquinas in the case of predication concerning God: recall the passage from SCG, I, 30, and notice also what he says at the beginning of the *Respondeo* of ST, I, 13, 2:

One should say that concerning names which are said of God negatively, or which signify a relation of him to creatures, it is manifest that in no way do they signify his substance, but rather the absence (*remotio*) of something from him, or his relation to another—or rather of something to him. But concerning the names which are said absolutely and affirmatively of God, such as 'good,' 'wise,' and the like, the opinions are manifold.

After excoriating some of the wrongheaded opinions, Aquinas gives his own view, which is that such terms are properly applied to God but imperfectly so, because the concepts we have of goodness and wisdom are based on our experience of imperfect examples. Now this is precisely the view we would expect if my diagnosis is correct. A perfect example of wisdom would be (or include) omniscience; a perfect example of power, omnipotence. Moreover, we can get some conceptual handle on these intrinsic maxima in the way I suggested, by means of operations which Aquinas explicitly approves of. Finally, we can get away with saying absolutely and affirmatively that God is wise without thereby claiming to know God's essence, because upon analysis, the predicate "is wise," as it properly applies to God, involves negative and relational components which carry us beyond the limits of our natural knowledge.

I claim as a matter of exegesis, then, that for the cases of degreed properties which are ascribed to God, Aquinas' version of the DDS with respect to the instance-instance identities is best understood in the way I have indicated. That is, for our test case, the omniscience of God = the omnipotence of God. We are allowed to think of the degreed properties of *being knowledgeable* and *being powerful* as varying somewhat independently through the less-than-maximal cases. (No one but the most entrenched Baconian believes that Knowledge is Power.) Yet the two properties converge at their intrinsic maxima; rather, they coalesce. Note, finally, that although the properties of *being omniscient* and *being omnipotent* are the intrinsic maxima of degreed properties, they are not themselves degreed properties. This is as things should be, for the other great-making attributes which appear in Aquinas' examples are not plausibly thought of as degreed properties either, such as "God is his essence, existence, eternity." Moreover, it was generally accepted by the medievales that essential properties are not degreed properties; the provenance for this item of belief was probably chapter V of Aristotle's *Categories*. And since God is supposed to be essentially omniscient, *being omniscient* cannot be a degreed property.

IV. Small Steps towards a Theory of Attributes

The interpretation of the DDS which I offered on Aquinas' behalf in the last section has two controversial theses to it. What the interpretation amounts to saying, first of all, is that *being omniscient*, *being omnipotent*, and the like are necessarily coextensive properties, and secondly, that necessarily coextensive properties are identical. If both theses can be sustained, then it follows that the omniscience of God = the omnipotence of God, and so on. In this section I shall discuss the second thesis. I shall assume provisionally that the first thesis is true: its problems will be indicated in the last section of the chapter.

According to the second thesis, if properties *being F* and *being G* are such that there is no logically possible world in which some individual instantiates the one without instantiating the other, then *being F* is necessarily identical with *being G*. (For the sake of simplicity, I am considering only first-order properties.) Now to many philosophers, the thesis has seemed obviously false. Alvin Plantinga has a characteristically crisp statement as to why it should be so regarded:

The property of being the square of 3 is necessarily coextensive with the property of being $\int_0^3 x^2 dx$; but surely these are not the very same properties. If the ontological argument is correct, the property of

knowing that God does not exist is necessarily coextensive with that of being a square circle; but surely these are not the *same* property, even if the argument is correct.¹³

Plantinga does not tell us why he thinks the properties in his examples are distinct even though necessarily coextensive. In the absence of an explicit account, we can adopt this strategy. Think of theories of property identity and diversity as forming a spectrum. Their positions on the spectrum are determined by their liberality in countenancing properties as distinct from each other. At the left end of the spectrum we will find fine-grained theories; theories, that is, which feature an exquisitely sensitive principle of individuation for properties. At the right end are coarse-grained theories. These theories employ principles of property individuation which do not find such subtle discriminations in the realm of properties as the fine-grained theories do. We can focus on a representatively large segment of the spectrum by letting the end-points of the segment be defined by the following two theories. At the left end is a view we can call the *predicate synonymy* view, and at the right end is what we can call the *set-extensional* view.

The predicate synonymy view maintains that for every syntactically well-formed predicate expression there is a property, which is the meaning of that predicate,¹⁴ and that any two nonsynonymous predicate expressions ipso facto pick out distinct properties.¹⁵ On the predicate synonymy view, in other words, predicate synonymy is a necessary (and presumably sufficient) condition for attribute identity. A consequence of the predicate synonymy view of properties is that two properties can be necessarily coextensive but distinct: their distinctness or lack thereof is determined by whether the favored predicate expressions used to designate them are synonymous or not. The predicate synonymy view thus gives us a very fine-grained account of the distinctness of properties along with a bounty of properties.

According to the set-extensional view, properties are to be identified with sets of (actual) objects. For example, the property of *being green* just is the set of all and only green things; the property of *being a marsupial* just is the set of all and only marsupials. Since the identity of a set is determined by its extension, it follows on the set-extensional view that coextensive properties are identical; a fortiori, necessarily coextensive properties are identical. So if, as a matter of contingent fact, all and only marsupials were green, *being green* and

¹³ Plantinga, "Actualism and possible worlds," in Loux, *The Possible*, pp. 259–260.

¹⁴ But not necessarily conversely: the predicate synonymy view can allow that there are properties for which no predicate expression exists.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Willard Van Orman Quine, "Reference and modality," in his *From a Logical Point of View*, second edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 150–151, 157.

being a marsupial would be the same property. Moreover, since the set consisting of all and only centaurs has the same extension as the set consisting of all and only the prime numbers between 7 and 11—namely, the null extension—it follows on the set-extensional view that *being a centaur* and *being a prime number between 7 and 11* are the same property.¹⁶

It is obvious that the set-extensional view is more coarse-grained than Plantinga's position. In correspondence Plantinga has informed me that he thinks that nonsynonymous predicates can express the same property, so he does not espouse the predicate synonymy view. The position he does hold, then, lies somewhere between the endpoints on our imaginary spectrum but further to the left of (further in the direction of fine-grainedness than) the position that necessarily coextensive properties are identical. (The latter position in turn is more fine-grained than the set-extensional view.)

I believe that the alternative account that necessarily coextensive properties are identical can explain the intuitions we find in Plantinga's remarks without accepting Plantinga's conclusions. Consider the properties of *being an equilateral (Euclidean) triangle* and *being an equiangular (Euclidean) triangle*, which we may assume to be necessarily coextensive. On the alternative account they are thus identical. Nevertheless, the corresponding predicate expressions "is an equilateral triangle" and "is an equiangular triangle" are assuredly nonsynonymous. Moreover, a person equipped only with a ruler might discover that the sides of a particular triangle are equal without thereby discovering that the angles are equal. But none of this should make us think that we are dealing with two properties instead of one. A person equipped only with a thermometer might discover that the temperature of two substances is the same without thereby discovering that their mean molecular kinetic energy is the same, but there are excellent theoretical reasons for our saying that the property of *having a certain temperature* just is (necessarily) the property of *having a certain corresponding mean molecular kinetic energy*. To think otherwise is either to confuse properties with concepts or necessity with apriority or both. The concept of equilaterality is involved in our understanding the predicate "is an equilateral

¹⁶ A mere recitation of these kinds of result may be enough to dissuade a person from taking the set-extensional view too seriously. But the predicate synonymy view has its own difficulties. Suppose there were two distinct properties which were necessarily coextensive. How could we tell that there were two properties in that case and not one? It would seem that the only plausible answer the predicate synonymy view can give is that the relevant predicate expressions are nonsynonymous. But that is a peculiar answer. It suggests that the inventory of properties which a thing may have can be determined only, in some cases, by examining the language which we use to describe the thing rather than the thing itself. If we wish to resist that conclusion, we should be chary about accepting the predicate synonymy view. Again, in the hypothetical case at hand, given that there are two properties, what accounts for their *necessary* coextensivity without accounting thereby for their identity?

triangle”: being able to use the predicate correctly presupposes and is excellent evidence for our having the concept in our repertoire. The concept of equian-gularity is clearly a different concept. It does not follow, however, that *being an equilateral triangle* and *being an equiangular triangle* are distinct properties. There is one structural property of certain triangles in virtue of which they are both equilateral and equiangular, or to put it another way, the structural property which is a particular triangle’s being equilateral = the structural property which is that triangle’s being equiangular. The identity is necessary but not typically known a priori, just as the identity between heat and kinetic energy is necessary but not known a priori. From the fact that one can discover that a triangle is equilateral without thereby discovering it to be equiangular, nothing follows about the distinctness of the properties in question.¹⁷

The alternative account of properties is more coarse-grained than Plantinga’s view, in that it does not countenance necessarily coextensive but distinct properties. So according to it, for example, if *being omniscient* and *being omnipotent* are necessarily coextensive, they are identical. This is not the occasion to offer a full-scale development and defense of the alternative account, which, if it were so developed, would be some kind of causal theory of properties. Fortunately I do not need to develop it further for my present purposes. For the alternative account, even in its unfinished form, has one advantage over Plantinga’s view. It matches perfectly Aquinas’ own explicit doctrines. Aquinas repudiates the predicate synonymy view of attribute identity in both *Summae* (SCG, I, 35; ST, I, 13, 4): predicate expressions such as “is omniscient” and “is omnipotent” signify different concepts; that is the basis of their non-synonymy. But although the concepts are diverse, they correspond to exactly the same property in God.

V. The Doctrine Militant

Let us return to the two objections to be found at the end of section II. It will be recalled that objection (1) was directed towards the instance-instance identities inherent in Aquinas’ DDS, The gravamen raised by objection (1) was that

¹⁷ The views expressed in this paragraph are heavily indebted to the following works: Hilary Putnam, “On properties,” in Nicholas Rescher et al. (eds.), *Essay in Honor of Carl G. Hempel* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 235–254; D. M. Armstrong, *Universals and Scientific Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 2, *A Theory of Universals*; Sydney Shoemaker, “Causality and properties,” in Peter van Inwagen (ed.), *Time and Cause* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), pp. 109–135; and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980). I do not mean to suggest that these philosophers would have nothing to disagree about.

according to principle (B), it turns out that the personhood of Socrates is the same property instance as the nonnumerality of Socrates. So much the worse for principle (B). There is nothing in the account of properties sketched in section iv which commits one to it. It may be that the personhood of Socrates is necessarily coextensive with the nonnumerality of Socrates, but for all that was said in section iv, they can still be distinct property instances. Clearly the properties of which they are instances, namely, *being a person* and *being a non-numeral*, are not coextensive properties: daffodils exemplify the latter but not the former property. So even if the two properties are necessarily coinstantiated in Socrates, they remain two. Instead of principle (B) we have the more commodious principle (C):

- (C) Property instances *the F-ness of x* and *the G-ness of y* are identical if and only if (1) the property *being F* is necessarily coextensive with the property *being G* and (2) $x = y$.

It is time now to draw Plantinga's last trump, objection (3). Objection (3) is aimed at the Deity-instance identities characteristic of the DDS, identities of the form "God is the *F-ness* of God." It remains true, after all we have said, that on Aquinas' DDS, God is a property instance. God is the omniscience of God; the omniscience of God is an instance of the property of *being omniscient*; therefore God is an instance of a property. But this conclusion offends against deeply entrenched theistic belief that God is knowing, loving, and active. In brief, God is a *person*; no property instance is a person; therefore God is not a property instance. Given the theist's beliefs about the personhood of God, the DDS must be rejected.

At the heart of Plantinga's argument is a proposition whose alleged intuitive grounding is much more secure than those sovereignty-aseity intuitions supporting the DDS:

- (P) No property is alive, knowledgeable, capable of action, powerful or good (DGHN?, p. 57).

(P) does not apply to the version of the DDS we are entertaining, but something resembling it very closely does:

- (P') No property instance is alive, knowledgeable, capable of action, powerful or good.

Plantinga clearly takes the predicates which appear in (P) and (P') to be collectively and uniquely applicable to persons, so that (P') is tantamount to

(P*) No property instance is a person.

Does (P*) wear its obviousness on its sleeve? I think not. Not only is it not obviously true: it is not true at all. It is not even *almost* true; true, that is, save the single case of God. To see why this is so, let us say a few more things about property instances and their relations to persons.

Consider this argument offered in support of (P*): “Persons are concrete, property instances are abstract. Thus they are of different ontological sorts.” This will not do. To say that a person is concrete is to say, I suppose, that he or she is in space and time or, at a minimum, in time (not to beg any questions against Cartesians). But many property instances are also concrete in that sense. *Properties* may not be concrete, especially if they are identified as sets, or meanings, or functions from possible worlds to sets of objects, or causal powers. (Not so if they are thought of as mereological sums.) Many property instances, however, unlike the properties of which they are instances, have spatial and temporal location. The redness of Rosie is on the surface of Rosie, and if Rosie is a standard 3-ball, the redness of Rosie is throughout Rosie. Smith’s wisdom is a property of *Smith*, not Jones, and one presumes it began to exist some time after Smith did. I see no reason to think, then, that property instances are any less concrete than the things to which they are instances.

“Perhaps, but property instances are ontologically inferior to persons. Persons are substances and thus independent entities. Property instances are dependent, parasitical entities. They are always instances *in* some substance, such that the substance could exist without the property instance but not vice versa. Thus no property instance could be a person.” There is something to this argument, but only with regard to *accidental* property instances. Smith may survive the demise of the wisdom of Smith, but we may be less confident about Smith’s surviving the demise of the personhood of Smith. The issue is especially sensitive for the orthodox theist, for as we have seen, orthodox theism maintains that all the divine attributes we have discussed are essential to God. Thus if God were to lose the omniscience of God, he would cease to be God. So in the case at hand, the omniscience of God is not any more dependent on God than God is on the omniscience of God: should either cease to be, the other would also.

Suppose that Giles is green and oblate. Giles thus instantiates the properties *being green* and *being oblate*. But by those very facts Giles also instantiates a conjunctive property, the property of *being green and oblate*. If Giles is also slimy, then Giles instantiates the further conjunctive property *being green and oblate and slimy*. If Giles is a continuant, some of the (nonessential) properties which Giles instantiates may have temporal indices. So Giles may exemplify the conjunctive property of *being-green-at- t_0 and red-at- t_1* .

Now consider all the properties which Giles instantiates throughout Giles' career. They form a very complicated conjunctive property. Let us call such a property, that is, a conjunctive property which includes all and only the essential and accidental properties of some individual thing, a *rich property*.¹⁸ What then is Giles? An instantiation of the appropriate rich property. Giles is a property instance. That conclusion should not jolt us, for as we have seen, property instances can be concrete and as independent as substances. In the case at hand we can see why the rich property instance associated with Giles is as independent as Giles is, for it *is* Giles.

We can generalize. For anything whatsoever, there is an appropriate rich property. Therefore, everything is a property instance of some rich property or other. Therefore, every person is a property instance, and since there is at least one person, (P*) is false. (In fact, if God is a person and the ontological argument is sound, then (P*) is necessarily false.) It is certainly true that *most* property instances are not persons, yet every person is a property instance.

Smith is an instance of a complex, conjunctive property, the property perhaps, *of being human and rational-from- t_1 -to- t_3 and irascible-at- t_2 and . . .* We can even put it this way: Smith is *Smith's* humanity and rationality-from- t_1 -to- t_3 and irascibility-at- t_2 and . . . So put, the identity does not provide a reductive analysis of what Smith is, but for our purposes, it need not. Neither does it maintain that Smith is a property of a bundle of properties. What it does maintain is that Smith is a property instance, *his own* property instance.

There is a rich property of which God is an instance. Unlike the case of created persons, whose rich properties are complex and chockablock with accidental properties, the rich property appropriate to God has none of these features. The instance-instance identities, along with the thesis that God has no accidental properties, gives us the result that the rich property associated with God has but one element, *being a Godhead*, which is the same property as *being omniscient*, *being omnipotent*, and all the rest. So the DDS I have presented does have the upshot that God is a property instance, but, *pace* Plantinga, I see nothing untoward or embarrassing about that.

The devices I have used in the last few paragraphs are not to be found in Aquinas: perhaps he would abominate them. It may be worth pointing out, nevertheless, how what I have said meshes with some of his doctrines. There are, of course, differences between created beings and God, including differences about how their respective rich properties get instantiated. For Aquinas, it is parcels of matter which instantiate the rich properties corresponding to

¹⁸ For all I have said, one rich property might have two or more instances. But there may be good arguments to the contrary. For present purposes I remain agnostic about the status of the principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles.

created persons. Angels, on the other hand, being immaterial (ST, I, 50, 2), are individuated in virtue of the fact that each is its own separate species (ST, I, 50, 4). That is, each angel has appropriate to it a rich property which has as one of its components an essential property distinct from the essential properties to be found in any other angel's rich property. Unlike angels, God is not a species (ST, I, 3, 5). He is, though, the only being whose essence is his existence; thus he is the only being whose rich property is "self-instantiating." Finally, it is interesting to note that, for Aquinas, that there is only one God—that that particular rich property can only have one instance—is something that needs to be argued for (see ST, I, 11, 3).

VI. The Doctrine not Triumphant

I think I have steered *a* version of the DDS through some tricky shoals. But the version relies on the necessary truth of a host of instance-instance identities, such as that the omniscience of God is the omnipotence of God. In section IV I said that there were two theses on which my interpretation of these instance-instance identities relied. One was the thesis that necessarily coextensive properties are identical, which was defended in section iv. The other was the thesis that the divine properties of *being omniscient*, *being omnipotent*, and all the others are necessarily coextensive. I think that there is a good *prima facie* case to be made for foisting the thesis onto the defender of the DDS. At the same time I also think it bequeaths a large problem to the defender of the DDS.

First for the presumption in favor of the thesis: I do not see how it could be that *being omniscient* and *being omnipotent* are *not* necessarily coextensive while at the same time, the omniscience of God *is* necessarily identical with the omnipotence of God. Suppose that they are not necessarily coextensive. Then there is a possible individual who has one property and lacks the other. But that surely is enough to show that the two properties are not identical. In section IV I defended the thesis that necessary coextensivity is a *sufficient* condition for property identity. Here I am appealing to the unexceptionable principle that necessary coextensivity is a *necessary* condition for property identity. So if the two properties are not necessarily coextensive, then we have this strange tandem of propositions: *being omniscient* and *being omnipotent* are not the same property, but they are necessarily the same property in God. That seems to be a highly implausible position to maintain, without one's relying on the DDS. But it is that very doctrine whose credentials are being investigated. To appeal to it somehow to justify the cotenability of the two propositions would be to beg the question.

As an example of the difficulty which I have in mind, let us look at an argument by James F. Ross. Ross wishes to embrace precisely the tandem of

propositions in question. The divine attributes are “not logically equivalent to one another,” they are “logically distinct attributes.”¹⁹ Thus it is possible for there to be a being who is omniscient but not omnipotent.²⁰ Nevertheless, “the attributes of God are not really distinct” (*PT*, p. 62). Here is the argument I wish to examine:

[T]he *entitative conditions* for God’s possessing *F* (a given attribute, say, “omnipotence”) are identical with the conditions for His possessing *G* (some other, logically distinct attribute, say, “wisdom”), since none of God’s essential attributes is or could be contingent upon anything other than the being or existing of God; moreover, it is not logically possible that the existence of something which shares the essential divine attributes should depend upon any causal conditions other than the existence of God. . . .

[A]mong the attributes of finite composite beings, it is possible for there to be a divergence of the causal conditions upon which the realization of those attributes in an existing being depends; but in God, there cannot be this divergence or even such a presence of causes in God. Therefore, the logically distinct attributes of creatures may be said to be distinct in a way in which the divine attributes cannot be—namely, as at least possibly having a diversity of causal conditions. (*PT*, pp. 58–59)

Ross’ argument hinges upon a principle about the identity of property instances and a claim about causation with respect to God. Stripped to its essentials, the argument is this.

- (1) If it is necessary that the causal conditions which account for the *F*-ness of *x* are the same as the causal conditions which account for the *G*-ness of *x*, then the *F*-ness of *x* = the *G*-ness of *x*.
- (2a) It is necessary that the causal conditions which account for the omniscience of God are the same as the causal conditions which account for the omnipotence of God.

¹⁹ James F. Ross, *Philosophical Theology* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), pp. 55, 62. Henceforward I shall refer to this work as “*PT*.”

²⁰ *PT*, pp. 54–55. One should note, however, that Ross also claims that “is omniscient,” even if predicated truly of some being other than God, would not be *synonymous* with “is omniscient” predicated of God (see esp. p. 60), because the predications would be analogical. I see nothing in Aquinas’ doctrine of analogical predication which would imply nonsynonymy in such a case.

Thus

- (3) The omniscience of God = the omnipotence of God.

It seems to me that principle (1) is false. The very same causal conditions which account for the characteristic spectrum of a hydrogen atom, *h*, also account for many of its dispositional properties to react in certain ways, and assuming “hydrogen” (and “*h*”) to be a rigid designator, this is necessarily so. But the property instances *h*’s *having such-and-such a spectrum* and *h*’s *being halogen-reactive* are not identical. Nevertheless, there is a principle close to (1) which is very tempting and which would help Ross’ case. It is not sufficient for the identity of property instances that they necessarily have the same causal progenitors, but it may be necessary and sufficient if they necessarily have the same progenitors *and* the same progeny. In place of (1), consider

- (1’) The *F*-ness of *x* = the *G*-ness of *x* if and only if (a) it is necessary that the causal conditions which account for the *F*-ness of *x* are the same as the causal conditions which account for the *G*-ness of *x* and (b) it is necessary that the causal potentialities of the *F*-ness of *x* are the same as the causal potentialities of the *G*-ness of *x*.

In terms of (1’), *h*’s *having such-and-such a spectrum* and *h*’s *being halogen-reactive* are not the same property instance; the one can have effects which the other would not have. According to principle (1’), in order for the omniscience of God to be the omnipotence of God, not only must proposition (2a) be true, but so must (2b):

- (2b) It is necessary that the causal potentialities of the omniscience of God are the same as the causal potentialities of the omnipotence of God;

that is, every possible exercise of God’s omniscience is an exercise of his omnipotence, and conversely. Propositions (1’), (2a), and (2b) imply (3).

What reason have we for accepting (2a)? As the passage from Ross’ book makes clear, (2a) is to be regarded as true because (necessarily) there are *no* causal conditions which account for God’s omniscience and omnipotence “other than the being or existing of God.” Now it is a mistake for a defender of the DDS to regard God’s existence as the cause of his omniscience, for if, as I think, causes are necessarily distinct from their effects, it follows that the being of God \neq the omniscience of God. So, consistent with the possibility of a favorable disposition towards the DDS, (2a) must be regarded as true because there

are no causal conditions whatsoever which account for God's omniscience and omnipotence. What lies behind (2a), then, is the doctrine of God's aseity—the doctrine, that is, that the nature of God is utterly independent of everything else.

We can now see how Ross' argument, if it is taken as an argument to establish the DDS, begs the issue. For the doctrine of God's aseity, which is needed to justify (2a), presupposes the DDS; the doctrine of God's aseity could not be true unless the DDS were true. The point was seen clearly by Anselm in the *Monologion*, XVII, passage cited earlier and by Aquinas (SCG, I, 18, 3, and ST, I, 3, 7). Suppose that God is not simple. If he is not simple, then he has "parts" or components. But if he has components, then he is dependent on those components for his being the being he is, and he thus does not exist *a se*. Ross' argument, then, although formally valid, displays the classic symptom of circularity: the only reason we have for accepting one of its premises, (2a), is that we already accept its conclusion, the DDS.

Thus it seems that the defender of the DDS should accept the thesis that the divine properties are necessarily coextensive. Now for the problem: what grounds do we have for believing that *being omniscient* and *being omnipotent* are necessarily coextensive? That no being could instantiate the one without thereby instantiating the other? It would certainly be surprising to find this out. An argument is called for here. Yet the best arguments I am presently aware of fall short. In order for the two properties to be necessarily coextensive, it would have to be the case necessarily that if x is omniscient, then x is omnipotent, and conversely. Consider now this argument for the first conditional. "If x is really omniscient, then x not only knows the truth values of all propositions (insofar as they have truth values), but x also knows how to do anything that can be done; x 's knowledge is thus complete, both theoretically and practically. If x knows how to do something that can be done, then x is able to do that thing. But to be able to do anything that can be done is to be omnipotent. Therefore, if x is omniscient, then x is omnipotent." The culprit premise is the second one. I can know how to do something without being able to do it. I know how to ride a bicycle, but if my leg is broken, I am not able to ride a bicycle. So the argument, as it stands, is not successful.

Chances may look even slimmer for convincing someone that *being omniscient* and *being omnibenevolent* are necessarily coextensive, or *being omnipotent* and *being perfectly merciful*. One does not find a trace of such arguments in the *Summae*. In the *Summa Theologiae* especially, Aquinas "proves" the DDS as early as is decently possible. This procedure has the effect of making such arguments appear otiose. The situation is hardly intellectually satisfying.

As I see it, then, the defender of the DDS is confronted with a large-scale task; namely, to uncover persuasive arguments which show that the divine

attributes are necessarily coextensive. (At a bare minimum, the defender must be prepared to rebut arguments which purport to show that certain divine attributes are mutually incompatible. But that task is not the sole responsibility of the defender of the DDS: any rational theist will feel its onus.) Although large-scale, the task need not be daunting. Its undertaking, if successful, would not only resuscitate the DDS but would also deepen our understanding of the concept of God. What I have hoped to do in this chapter is to show that the undertaking is not absurd and to provide some motivation for beginning it.²¹

²¹ An earlier version of this chapter received helpful commentary from Philip Kitcher, Hilary Kornblith, Norman Kretzmann, Alvin Plantinga, Philip Quinn, and Eleonore Stump.

Simplicity and Immutability in God

“I am God: I change not.” (Malachi 3:6)

STEADFASTNESS is a virtue we prize in persons. All other things being equal, we disapprove of those who break their promises, forsake their covenants, or change their minds capriciously. We regard as childish those who are easily deflected from the pursuit of their goals. We pity those who suffer radical transformations of character. It is not surprising, then, that many theists believe that no such fickle flickerings of human inconstancy could characterize God.¹ Many theists—especially those infected with a bit of philosophy—carry these speculations a step further. God is supremely steadfast, but he is also insusceptible to ceasing to be the being he is. A steadfast mortal is still mortal. If it be true that we are immortal, perhaps that is only because God’s sustaining activity will not let death be ultimately proud. In contrast, nothing could possibly prevail against his nature. If he is essentially omnipotent, for example, then there is no time at which his power could possibly falter. For many theists, then, God is both supremely steadfast and essentially indomitable.

Many orthodox theologians and philosophers have taken yet a further step. For example, the great medieval philosophers argued that God is utterly and completely immutable, that no change of any kind can befall him.² He does not get better; he does not get worse. He does not learn, nor does he forget. He does not become wrathful or sorrowful. The activities of his creatures do not stir him to respond, for to respond is to change. It is this doctrine—the Doctrine of Divine Immutability (DDI)—which I wish to examine and defend.

¹ Genesis 6:5–7 can easily be read as recording a change of mind in God. Such a reading receives a vigorous denial both by Philo (*Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit*, 20–32) and St. Augustine (*De Civitate Dei*, XV, 24–25). See also Numbers 23:19 and I Samuel 15:11, 15:29.

² Particularly strong and influential statements of the thesis can be found in St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, 2, 3; XV, 5, 7–8; St. Anselm, *Monologion*, 25; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 9.

In recent years the DDI has drawn fire from virtually every philosopher who has considered it. Perhaps the most fundamental objection to it is that an immutable being could not be a *personal* being, a being who intervenes in history, who cares for his creatures, who is aware of our sins and works for our redemption, who hears and answers our prayers, who consoles us in our grief, who inspires us in our joy. An immutable God would be a completely impassive God, uncomfortably akin to the textbook caricature of Aristotle's narcissistic unmoved mover.³ Moreover, once we overcome our fears about change—caused, in large part, by our trying to rebuild the timeless temples of Elea and Athens in Jerusalem—we can see that God changes in all sorts of ways which redound to his credit. Here is but one example, which I describe in such a way as to emphasize the changes which apparently occur in God. At such-and-such a time, t_1 , God willed that the Egyptians should suffer a hailstorm, and after that, as a result of God's perceiving at t_2 the Pharaoh's continued intransigence and as a reaction to it, he willed that the Egyptians be visited with a plague of locusts at t_3 . At t_3 he could not still have been willing the hailstorm, for if he had, given that God's will is unimpedible, it would still have been hailing at t_3 .

One may be excused for wondering, however, whether the dispute between medievals and moderns has really been joined. For in addition to arguing for God's immutability, the medievals argued strenuously that God is perfectly *active*, with no trace of passivity.⁴ Yet these two characteristics seem to pull in opposite directions: how can a being be both immutable and active? I suggest that the answer lies in a relatively neglected doctrine which the medievals thought entailed both characteristics and which illuminates the present issues. The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS) maintains that God has no "parts" or components whatsoever. He has no properties, neither essential nor accidental. He has no spatial extension. Nor does he have any temporal extension: there is no division of his life into past or future stages, for that would imply temporal compositeness.⁵

³ See, for example, W. Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 61 (1960–1961), 87–108, esp. 99–101; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in Clifton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (eds.), *God and the Good* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 181–203; and Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 211–222.

⁴ See, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 16; *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1–2.

⁵ See, for example, St. Anselm, *Monologion*, 21; *Proslogion*, 20. Dennis C. Holt, following a claim made by A. N. Prior and others, has argued that things and persons have no temporal parts; only their lives or histories do. The claim is then applied to the *Monologion* in an attempt to show that Anselm's arguments for the eternity of God are misguided. God indeed has no temporal location or extension, but then neither do we, and so there is no crucial difference in that respect between God and us. See Holt's "Timelessness and the Metaphysics of Temporal Existence," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 18 (1981), 149–156. Although I cannot argue the point in detail here, I see no compelling reason to accept Holt's thesis.

The DDS in turn is motivated by the consideration that God is a perfect being, and that qua perfect, he must be independent from all other things for his being the being he is, and he must be sovereign over all other things. If God himself were composite, then he would be dependent upon his components for his being what he is, whereas they would not be dependent upon him for their being what they are.⁶

Speaking strictly, then, an adherent of the DDS cannot say that omnipotence is an *attribute* of God, for the DDS maintains that in the case of God, the metaphysical distinction between a substance and its attributes does not apply. As Aquinas put it, God *is* his omnipotence, where the “is” here expresses a necessary identity. In similar fashion, if God is omniscient, then God is the omniscience of God. It follows, of course, that the omniscience of God is the omnipotence of God.

To be sure, these are strange-sounding sayings. I think, however, that philosophical sense can be made of them if one can defend the intelligibility of the following theses:

- (1) The thesis that all the divine attributes are necessarily coextensive. According to this thesis, it would be impossible for any being to instantiate the attribute *being omniscient*, say, without also instantiating the attribute *being omnipotent*, and vice versa.
- (2) The thesis that necessarily coextensive attributes are necessarily identical.

Of these two theses (1) surely requires more defense. Notice that (1) and (2) are jointly sufficient to underwrite such identities as that the omniscience of God = the omnipotence of God.

- (3) The thesis that if God exists, then he is an instance of an attribute, the attribute of *being a Godhead*, which attribute is identical, by theses (1) and (2), to *being omniscient*, etc. Thesis (3) is itself an entailment of a more general thesis; namely, that any individual thing is an instance of a *rich property*, the conjunctive property formed from all and only those essential and accidental properties which truly characterize the individual in question. In the case of God, a defender of the DDS will insist on three provisions with respect to thesis (3): (a) God’s rich property is not multiply instantiable: there cannot be two Gods;

⁶ See, for example, St. Anselm, *Monologion*, 17; *Proslogion*, 18; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 18; *Summa Theologiae*, I, 3, 7; Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 28–37.

(b) God's rich property contains only one conjunct; (c) God's rich property contains no accidental properties. Thesis (3) implies that God is his own Godhead, and thus his own omniscience, and so on.

I shall not here directly defend the DDS, as defined by theses (1)–(3).⁷ Instead I shall offer an indirect defense, showing how the DDS enables us to understand the DDI, and in particular, the notion of an immutable person.

The DDS implies that there are no temporally successive stages to God's existence. It is thus incompatible with God's being sempiternal. In fact, the DDS implies that God is eternal in Boethius' sense, i.e., that God enjoys "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."⁸ "Complete possession all at once," because there are no past or future stages in a simple being's life; "illimitable life," because a simple being, qua perfect, must be supremely active, and activity presupposes life. Now it is clear that if God is eternal, he is immutable: if there are not even two stages in his life, then a fortiori there are no two stages in his life such that something in the one stage is different from something in the other. Thus the DDS implies that God is eternal, which in turn implies the DDI.

But how can an eternal, immutable being be a person? Well, what is it to be a person? Daniel Dennett has pointed out that there have been at least six different notions of personhood put forth in the philosophical tradition, each offered as an individually necessary if not sufficient condition of personhood.⁹ A is a person only if:

- (1) A is a rational being.
- (2) A is a being to which states of consciousness can be attributed.
- (3) Others regard or can regard A as a being to which states of consciousness can be attributed.
- (4) A is capable of regarding others as beings to which states of consciousness can be attributed.
- (5) A is capable of verbal communication.
- (6) A is self-conscious; i.e., A is capable of regarding him/her/itself as a subject of states of consciousness.

⁷ I have defended theses (2) and (3) elsewhere. See my "Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies*, 18 (1982), 451–471. Reprinted as Chapter 2 of this volume.

⁸ Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, Prose 6. The translation is from Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78 (1981), 429–458, esp. 430.

⁹ Daniel Dennett, "Conditions of Personhood," in Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *The Identities of Persons* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), pp. 175–196. Dennett explores the connections between the six conditions. I shall reluctantly suppress discussion of those issues.

Suppose we take the high road and insist that in order to be a person, A must satisfy *all* of (1) through (6). Our question then becomes this: can an eternal, immutable being satisfy (1) through (6), thus not precluding its being a person?

Let us consider conditions (2), (3), (4), and (6) first. In an obvious way, they all require that certain kinds of states of consciousness be properly ascribed to A. Conditions (2) and (3) require only the ascription of first-order states (e.g., perhaps, that A believes that *p*), while (4) and (6) require the ascription of some second-order states (such as, perhaps, that A believes that B desires that *p*). Now there are some sorts of mental states or activities which by their very nature either take time themselves or imply past or future mental states or activities in the same agent. *Growing resentful* is an example of the former kind; *forgetting the date of the Battle of Stamford Bridge* and *anticipating the joy of getting to the end of this chapter* are examples of the latter. It is clear that an eternal, immutable being cannot be the subject of any such mental states or activity. But there are other kinds of mental activity whose correct ascription to an agent implies no necessary temporal spread. It takes time to grow resentful but it need not take any time at all to *know* something. Of course one can know something for a period of years, but the point is that knowing is not a process whose fulfillment takes time or an activity which entails the existence of earlier or later stages in the mental life of the knowing agent. Similar remarks hold for *willing*. The concept of an instantaneous intention, whose objective is realized simultaneously with its formulation, may tax one's credulity, but there is no absurdity in the idea of a volition whose object is simultaneously realized: "Fiat lux.' Et facta est lux." Finally, there are analogous observations to be made concerning second-order states and activities. My expectation that I will learn all about recursive function theory by the end of the year is a coherent expectation only if I am in time. But A's awareness that A knows that *p* does not in itself imply that A is in time. So although an eternal, immutable being cannot wax wroth, remember, forget, calculate, or fall in love, such a being can know, will, love, and know that it knows, and thus be the subject of certain kinds of states or activities of consciousness.¹⁰ The repertoire of kinds of states of consciousness available to an eternal, immutable being may thus be somewhat restricted: there is no reason, however, to think that the curtailed repertoire threatens the candidacy for personhood of such a being.

Condition (1) requires that persons be rational beings. Once again, there are some elements of human rationality which could not characterize an immutable being. An eternal, immutable being could not make inductive inferences based on past experience, nor (it seems to me) infer "B" from "(A \rightarrow B)"

¹⁰ This point is made admirably clearly in Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," pp. 446–447.

and “A.” Nevertheless, such a being could *understand* that “B” is a consequence of “(A \rightarrow B)” and “A” and understand that evidence *e* is good evidence for hypothesis *h*. Rationality in action requires a certain fit between an agent’s beliefs, desires, and actions. We now have reason to believe that believing and desiring need not imply temporality, and I now want to suggest how God, qua eternal, immutable being, can be said to act.

Let us return to the hailstorm–plague of locusts example and see how the DDI, buttressed by the DDS, can cope with it. According to Aquinas, the power of God is the substance of God and the power of God is the activity of God,¹¹ whence it follows that the substance of God is the activity of God, i.e., God’s essence *is* his activity, and this in turn just *is* God. Since God is his activity and his activity can have no stages, processes, or compositeness to it, it must be that the activity by which he wills the hailstorm at t_1 is the activity by which he wills the plague of locusts at t_3 . That is, one and the same divine, eternal activity has as two of its effects (1) that the Egyptians experience a hailstorm at t_1 and (2) that the Egyptians suffer a plague of locusts at t_3 . There is surely nothing unusual about one and the same cause having distinct and nonsimultaneous effects. A particular Sun storm may be the cause of certain thermal phenomena in the vicinity of the Sun and, some eight minutes later, certain radio phenomena on Earth. Of course the case is not perfectly analogous to God’s activity, since the radio phenomena are a more indirect effect of the Sun storm than the thermal phenomena, whereas the plague of locusts is not a more indirect effect of God’s activity than the hailstorm: God’s activity is equally present to both t_1 and t_3 . Moreover, the Sun storm is a datable event with temporal duration, while in the hailstorm–plague of locusts case, God’s activity is not, even though the effects of it are. I do not see, then, any absurdity in ascribing rational activity to an immutable being.

Condition (5) requires that persons be capable of verbal communication. The account sketched in the previous paragraph provides the wherewithal to see how an eternal, immutable being could have such a capacity. In “speaking” to Moses, God brought it about that Moses heard certain statements. Moses’ hearing the statements is a temporal process which took place during a certain interval, but it does not follow from that fact that God’s bringing it about is a temporal process or even that it happened at a certain time.¹² A defender of the DDI must be careful with a question like “When did God will the hailstorm?” The apparently obvious answer, “at t_1 ,” misleads. The sentence “God wills that there be a hailstorm at t_1 ” is to be distinguished, depending on how

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 8–9.

¹² On this latter point, see Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity.”

we interpret the scope of the temporal modifier “at t_1 .” If it is interpreted *in sensu composito* the sentence expresses the proposition

(P1) At t_1 God wills that there be a hailstorm.

Interpreted *in sensu diviso*, the sentence expresses the proposition

(P2) God wills that-there-be-a-hailstorm-at- t_1 .

A defender of the DDI will brand (P1) as false, but (P2) can be accepted as true, provided that the verb “wills” is understood as being tenseless. In similar fashion, the question “When did God will the hailstorm?” is amphibolous between these two questions:

(P3) When in God’s career did he will that the hailstorm occur?

(P4) When did the hailstorm, which God wills, occur?

The answer to (P4) is a straightforward “at t_1 ,” but the DDI defender should greet (P3) with stony silence.

I have been arguing that there is no absurdity to the notion of an immutable yet active personal God, and I have helped myself to the DDS in order to make my argument. In the remainder of this chapter I want to examine four objections to my enterprise. The first one questions the necessity of the DDS for the DDI; the other three allege that the DDS itself generates various kinds of unacceptable consequences.¹³

Objection 1. “The doctrine of God’s eternity is sufficient by itself to establish the DDI. That is, if God is eternal (in Boethius’ sense) then he is immutable. Thus we do not need the DDS to secure the DDI, and if we do not need it, why should we use it?”

Consider the following analogy. “The fact that light rays bend in the vicinity of the Sun is implied by the thesis that space is curved. The General Theory of Relativity implies that space has curvature, but we do not need the General Theory of Relativity to establish the fact that light rays bend in the vicinity of the Sun; the thesis that space is curved is sufficient by itself.” The point to be made in reply here is that without the General Theory of Relativity we have no good antecedent reason to accept the thesis that space is curved. By itself the

¹³ I owe the first and the fourth objections to Eleonore Stump, who commented on an earlier and shorter version of this chapter at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division meeting in 1981. I am happy to acknowledge my debt to her but not confident that I will have overcome her skepticism about the DDS.

thesis is unmotivated and ad hoc to the case of bending light rays. The General Theory of Relativity serves to justify the thesis that space is curved by showing how it fits into a more comprehensive theory about the physical world.

The moral of the story should be clear with respect to the first objection. Entailment is not justification. The doctrine of God's eternity does indeed entail the DDI, but that fact alone provides no reason for accepting either it or the DDI. The explanatory necessity of the DDS emerges when we ask why we should accept the doctrine of God's eternity. The DDS highlights the fact that both the doctrine of God's eternity and the DDI are embedded in a more comprehensive theory about God's nature. If God were not eternal and immutable he would not be simple, and if he were not simple, he would not be perfect. It is ultimately the "logic of perfection" which gives us the DDS and the DDI.

Objection 2. "Abbreviate the proposition that the Pharaoh is intransigent at t_2 by ' P ' and the proposition that the Egyptians suffer a plague of locusts at t_3 by ' L .' If he is omniscient, God knows that P and L are logically independent propositions. Now consider the following dilemma. Either God's knowledge that P is identical with his knowledge that L or it is distinct. If it is distinct, then the DDS is false. But the notion that God's knowledge that P is identical to his knowledge that L is unintelligible. Your knowledge that P is a different item of knowledge from your knowledge that L simply because P and L are independent propositions. The same must be true of God. Therefore, if God is simple, he can know at most one thing, and so he is not omniscient."

Solution: the DDS maintains that, necessarily, the activity by which God knows that P = the activity by which God knows that L . It does not thereby imply that $P = L$, nor does the fact that $P \neq L$ imply that an agent's knowing that P requires an act of cognition different from that agent's knowing that L . A being of extremely limited cognitive capacities may not be able to walk and chew gum at the same time, but we humans can know different propositions in one act of cognition. Acts of cognition are not individuated by their atomic propositional objects, or at least there is no good reason to think that that is so. One and the same act of cognition may reveal to me that the window is closed *and* freshly painted. By extending this line of reasoning one can see that there is no absurdity in the notion of a being of unlimited cognitive capacities being aware of the truth of an unlimited number of propositions by means of one act of cognition. The *content* of God's knowledge may be unlimited, but the DDS need only insist that the *activity* by which he knows is simple.

Objection 3. "The DDS is incompatible with human freedom, if human freedom involves the possibility of doing otherwise. For the following two features of the DDS preclude there being any contingency in the created world:

- (A) Necessarily, the omniscience of God is the essence of God.

- (B) Necessarily, God is the essence of God; i.e., it is not possible for God to be other than what he is in any respect; if God were different in any respect, he would not be God.

Now suppose that the Pharaoh's intransigence at t_2 is a specimen of free behavior. This supposition implies, at a minimum, that the proposition P is logically contingent; although true, P could have been false. Now the argument, which takes the shape of a *reductio*:

- (1) It is possible for P to have been false. (Supposition)
 - (2) If it is possible for P to have been false, then it is possible for God not to know that P .
 - (3) If it is possible for God not to know that P , then it is possible for God's omniscience to be other than what it is.
- Thus: (4) It is possible for God's omniscience to be other than what it is. (From (1), (2), and (3))
- Thus: (5) It is possible for God's essence to be other than what it is. (From (4) and (A))
- Thus: (6) It is possible for God to be other than what he is. (From (5) and (B))

But (6) clearly contradicts (B). Therefore if the DDS is true, there are no logically contingent propositions and no free actions."

Note that the argument correctly appeals to God's omniscience but not to foreknowledge; God has no foreknowledge if he is eternal. Nevertheless, the argument trades on an ambiguity in the phrase "God's omniscience." In one sense "God's omniscience" could have been otherwise, as step (4) maintains. In this sense of "God's omniscience," *what* God knows or the *content* of God's knowledge would be different from what it in fact is. If the Pharaoh had not been intransigent at t_2 , God would know that the Pharaoh is not intransigent at t_2 . So step (4) is more perspicuously rendered as

- (4') It is possible for the content of God's omniscience to be other than what it is,

and the defender of the DDS need have no demurral about (4'). But (4') does not take us to step (5), even with the aid of (A). To do that, (A) would have to be interpreted as

- (A') Necessarily, the content of God's omniscience is the essence of God.

Now the DDS defender need not accept (A') as a correct gloss of (A). What he/she must accept is (A*):

- (A*) Necessarily, the power or activity by which God knows all things is the essence of God.

And, to complete the story, the combination of (4') and (A*) does not yield (5).

Objection 4. "The DDS logically precludes *God's* freedom of will. Let us suppose that he wills that-there-be-a-hailstorm-at- t_1 , and let us abbreviate the hyphenated material as "that-H." We are supposing, then, that

- (1) God wills that-H.

Does he have it in his power not to will that-H?¹⁴ To suppose that he does is to suppose, at a minimum,

- (2) It is possible that God not will that-H.

But (2) flies in the face of three principles implied by the DDS. One is principle (B), mentioned in Objection 3. The others are these:

- (C) Necessarily, the essence of God is the will of God.
(D) Necessarily, the will of God contains no parts, stages, or complexity of any kind.

(D) implies that God's willing that-H is not a *part* of God's will; it necessarily is God's will. That is, by (D) we have

- (3) Necessarily, if God wills that-H, then God's will is God's willing that-H.

(3) and (C) yield

- (4) Necessarily, if God wills that-H, then God's essence is God's willing that-H.

¹⁴ Do not confuse this question with another one—"Does he have it in his power to will that-not-H?" The second question asks whether God can will some outcome other than what he in fact wills, while the first one asks whether he can refrain from willing a certain outcome which he in fact wills. Of course, if we assume (a) that the two outcomes are logically incompatible and (b) that God does not will logically incompatible outcomes, then it follows that if he wills that-not-H, then he does not will that-H. (Assumptions (a) and (b) are not enough to establish the converse.) In other words, given assumptions (a) and (b), God's not willing that-H is a necessary condition for his willing that-not-H.

But (1) allows us to detach from (4)

(5) God's essence is God's willing that-H.

Now if we accept (2), then (2) and (5) imply

(6) It is possible that God's essence be other than what it is.

But since God is his essence, according to (B), (6) and (B) imply

(7) It is possible that God be other than what he is.

Step (7), however, contradicts (B). So if the DDS is true, then (1) and (2) cannot both be true, and in general, God cannot do other than what he in fact does."

The argument fails, for a reason similar to the reason the argument in Objection 3 failed. "The will of God," as it appears in (C) and (D), is ambiguous. It can mean God's willing power or activity on the one hand or, on the other, what God wills, i.e., the results, outcomes, or contents of God's willing activity; compare "the will of God always achieves the good" with "your present happiness is the will of God." Bearing this ambiguity in mind, we can consider two versions each of (C) and (D):

(C') Necessarily, the essence of God is what God wills.

(C*) Necessarily, the essence of God is the power or activity by which God wills all things.

(D') Necessarily, what God wills contains no parts, stages, or complexity.

(D*) Necessarily, the power or activity by which God wills all things contains no parts, stages, or complexity.

The DDS is not committed either to (C') or (D'), and that is a good thing, for on a straightforward interpretation of them, they are false. The DDS is committed to (C*) and (D*). But (D*) does not imply (3); the closest it gets us to (3) is

(3') Necessarily, if God wills that-H, then the power or activity by which God wills all things is the power or activity by which God wills that-H.

In turn, (3') and (C*) give us not (4) but

(4') Necessarily, if God wills that-H, then God's essence is the power or activity by which God wills that-H.

Steps (1) and (4') imply

(5') God's essence is the power or activity by which God wills that-H.

However, (5') and (2), the assumption that it is possible that God not will that-H, simply do not imply (6). Instead of (2), one would need, in conjunction with (5'), something like

(2') It is possible that the power or activity by which God wills that-H be other than what it is.

There is a world of difference between (2) and (2'). In particular, (2) can be true while (2') is false. Thus, a defender of the DDS can accept (2) and reject (2').

To see the difference between (2) and (2') it is crucial to distinguish between a power or activity and its manifestation. Consider Smith, who has the power to lift any object whose weight is less than or equal to 150 pounds and who does not have the power to lift any object which weighs more than 150 pounds. In the world as it actually is, Smith can lift some objects but not others. Let us now consider two different counterfactual situations. One is a world, W_1 , in which there are no objects which weigh over 150 pounds; the other a world, W_2 , in which every object weighs over 150 pounds. (Such worlds may have different physical laws from the actual world.) In these two cases it is perfectly coherent to suppose that Smith's lifting power remains invariant, even though its manifestations are quite different: in W_1 Smith can lift every object; in W_2 he can lift none.¹⁵ The point to be seen here is that the manifestations of Smith's invariant power will typically change as the counterfactual situations change.

Think now of God, who according to the DDS, is his own power or activity and who, according to traditional theism, is supremely powerful and active. The manifestation of that power in different counterfactual situations can or will vary just because the situations are different. In a situation in which the Pharaoh relents at t_2 and lets Moses' people go, it is reasonable to think that the manifestation of God's activity at t_3 will be different: the Egyptians will not suffer a plague of locusts. But this supposition provides no reason to think that God's power or activity would somehow be different in that counterfactual situation from what it is in the actual situation in which the Pharaoh did not relent. Thus it seems to me that a defender of the DDS can maintain simultaneously

¹⁵ Extreme verificationists might quarrel over the intelligibility of the attribution to Smith in W_2 of the power in question, since in that world, there would be no way to distinguish Smith's power from that of a person who could only lift objects weighing less than 149 pounds or less than 148 pounds and so on.

that God can will other than what he does will and that God's willing power or activity cannot be other than what it is.

There may be other, fatal objections to the DDI and the DDS, but if so, I have not seen them. My provisional conclusion, then, is that the doctrines are surprisingly resilient and worth more serious attention than they have recently received.

Immutability and Predication

What Aristotle Taught Philo and Augustine

Philosophically sensitive religious believers in antiquity found themselves in the ironic position of using the conceptual tools forged by the pagan Greek philosophers to construct their theologies. Some theists found—and still find—that situation deplorable. When Tertullian asked what Athens has to do with Jerusalem, he thought he already knew the answer. Some of his choicest abuse was reserved for Aristotle, who “instituted for them [sc. heretics] *dialectics*, a cunning chameleon [*versipellis*] of constructing and destroying, a bully of opinions, pitiless in inferring, a worker of disagreements in arguments, vexing even to itself, a detractor of all things, it has treated nothing at all.”¹

The major text for Aristotle’s dialectics is the *Topics*, which begins its enquiry by presenting a theory of predication. Aristotle’s theory of predication figures prominently (but in different ways) in attempts by Philo and St. Augustine to understand philosophically the thesis that God is *immutable*, or utterly unchanging. One suspects that Tertullian and his tribe would find lamentable not just the employment of the Aristotelian tools but also, more basically, the assumption that there is some part of religious belief for which such treatment is necessary or helpful. Philo the Jew and Augustine the Christian endanger the City of God by bringing into its gates a wooden horse left by the Greeks.

It is not my purpose in this essay to defend the doctrine of God’s immutability, let alone the enterprise of rational theology. But neither are my interests entirely antiquarian. In the process of examining Philo’s and Augustine’s

¹ Tertullian, *De praescriptionibus Haereticorum*, 7. My translation is based on the Latin text printed in Tertullian, *Opera*, ed. E. F. Leopold (Leipzig: Bernh. Tauchnitz, 1841), Vol. 3, p. 5.

discussions and their indebtedness to Aristotle's theory of predication, I shall try to indicate some of the ways in which the discussions might contribute to contemporary debates in philosophical theology.

I. Philo and Idionic Predication

In the *Legum Allegoria* Philo says that "it is necessary for every created thing to undergo change, for this is its *idion*, just as [the *idion*] of God is to be the unchanged."² It is customary to translate *idion* as "property," a custom encouraged by its translation into Latin as *proprium*. But since philosophical usage assigns "property" to the designation of any kind of predicable term, it is best for our purposes if we stick to *idion*. Philo knew that *idion* is a technical term in Aristotle's logical theory: it is one of the four predicables introduced in Book I of the *Topics*. Aristotle characterizes it in this way:

An *idion* is something which does not show the essence of a thing, but belongs to that thing alone and is counterpredicated of it.³

The capacity to learn grammar, according to Aristotle, is an *idion* of persons. Aristotle's discussion makes clear that the following features hold for idionic predication. (1) If *I* is an *idion* of *A*, then *I* "does not show the essence" of *A*. Although Aristotle has little to say about this feature, the point is primarily epistemological. One could know that persons have a capacity to learn grammar without thereby knowing what it is to be a person. (2) If *I* is an *idion* of *A*, then *I* "belongs to *A* alone." Only persons have a capacity to learn grammar: *idia* are species-specific. (3) If *I* is an *idion* of *A*, then *I* is "counterpredicated" (*antikātēgoreitai*) of *A*. This feature is the converse of feature (2). If having a capacity to learn grammar is an *idion* of persons, then each and every person has the capacity. (4) If *I* is an *idion* of *A*, then it cannot be a contingent matter that features (2) and (3) hold. With respect to feature (2), Aristotle argues that sleep is not an *idion* of persons even if it should happen that only persons are sleeping, because it is possible that other creatures be sleeping. Aristotle explicitly affirms feature (3) in *Topics* V, 133^a20–24: every person always and of necessity is an animal capable of receiving knowledge, but this

² Philo, *Legum Allegoria*, II, 9, 33. My translation is based on the Greek text printed in *Philo*, Vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 246.

³ Aristotle, *Topics*, I, 5, 102^a18–19. My translation is based on the Greek text printed in Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* and *Topics*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 282.

capacity is not a differentia (or genus) or definition; since it belongs of necessity, it is not an accident.⁴

There is a link missing in the concatenation of (1) through (4). Features (1)–(4) give no account of what the connection is between a thing or kind of thing and its *idia*. Why is it necessarily the case that all and only things of kind *A* have *idion I*? Why is it that all and only persons have a capacity to learn grammar? It cannot be merely a coincidence: Aristotle of all people knew the difference between coincidence and necessity. The most appealing answer outruns the textual evidence but is strongly suggested by features (1)–(4). Persons necessarily have a capacity to learn grammar because that capacity is entailed and explained by what it is to be a person. To generalize, we can add a fifth feature to Aristotle's doctrine of *idia*, whose lack of straightforward textual support is signaled by an asterisk. (5*) If *I* is an *idion* of *A* and *E* is the essence of *A*, then *A*'s having *I* is entailed and explained by *A*'s having *E*. Feature (5*) requires more than entailment: since *E* and *I* are necessarily counterpredicable, there is also an entailment from *A*'s having *I* to *A*'s having *E*. However, the order of explanations is typically asymmetrical. It is plausible to suppose, on Aristotle's behalf, that we do not explain what it is to be a person by citing the capacity to learn grammar but that we can explain why all and only persons have that capacity once we understand fully what it is to be a person, that is, once we understand fully the essence of a person.⁵

Aristotle's notion of *idion* fits Philo's purposes quite nicely. To say that immutability is an *idion* of God is to say that God is necessarily unchangeable and that God alone is necessarily unchangeable. (Philo calls God *to genikōtaton*, which conveys, among other things, the belief that no other being is the same kind of being that God is.⁶) At the same time, nothing of God's essence is thereby disclosed, allowing Philo to adhere to the thesis that "it is impossible for the essence of God to have been understood at all by any creature."⁷ Thus

⁴ As Aristotle usually thinks of them, *idia* are predicated of species, not individuals. However, he is not entirely uniform in his usage. There are some delicate logical issues involved here, but we can ignore them and speak as if individuals and genera can also have *idia*. See Jonathan Barnes, "Property in Aristotle's Topics," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 52(1970): 136–155, esp. 147–152.

⁵ One might try to argue that feature (5*) is really implied by feature (1). I have my doubts. In any event, (5*) is endorsed by Ross and Verbeke. See W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 61; G. Verbeke, "La notion de propriété dans les *Topiques*," in G. E. L. Owen (ed.), *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 257–276, esp. pp. 262–263, 264–265.

⁶ Philo, *Legum Allegoria*, II, 21, 86.

⁷ Philo, *De Posteritate Caini*, 48, 168. My translation is based on the Greek text printed in Philo, Vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 426.

Philo thinks that we can know that God is necessarily and uniquely immutable, know that this fact is somehow to be explained by God's being what he is, and yet not know what it is to be God.

Philo does not have more to say specifically about the semantics of divine immutability.⁸ In the absence of further explicit discussion, one might think that the notion of idionic predication can be developed in two contrary directions. If *I* is an *idion* of *A* and *E* is the essence of *A*, then *I* and *E* are necessarily coextensive. Are *I* and *E* thereby identical? Is necessary coextensiveness a necessary *and* sufficient condition for attribute identity, or is it merely necessary? If *I* and *E* are identical, then the connection between them can be explicated in familiar terms. There is a necessary identity of attributes, but that the attributes are identical is typically an item of a posteriori knowledge if it is known at all: think of recent philosophical discussions of the connection between heat and mean molecular kinetic energy. If on the other hand *I* and *E* are distinct attributes, then the most natural thing to say is that *I* *supervenes* on *E*.

The first alternative can accommodate the thesis that necessarily coextensive attributes are identical; the second cannot. To see the difference between the two alternatives, consider a case in which one thing appears to have two or more *idia*. Having the capacity to learn grammar is an *idion* of persons, and so, let us suppose, is having the capacity for laughter. The first alternative will maintain that the two apparent *idia* are in fact the same; indeed, they are identical with the essence of a person. On the first alternative the difference between *idion* and essence, including the notion of asymmetrical explanation introduced in (S*), can be accounted for entirely by epistemological considerations. The second alternative, in contrast, permits the capacity for learning grammar to be ontologically distinct from the capacity for laughter and requires both to be ontologically distinct from the essence of a person, upon which they supervene.

Now if idionic predication is a kind of supervenient predication, then Philo's thesis that immutability is an *idion* of God requires reference to two distinct components in God, his essence on the one hand and his being immutable on the other. In contrast, if idionic predication is a matter of identity-with-essence-cum-epistemological-differences, then God's immutability just *is* his essence, and God's essence explains his being immutable in the same way a body's having a certain mean molecular kinetic energy explains its having a certain temperature. The more natural reading of Aristotle's pronouncements on *idion* suggest supervenience. But however Aristotle's views are best interpreted,

⁸ For further discussion of the use to which Philo put ancient semantic theory in order to understand propositions about God, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), Ch. 11.

theists have a motive for maintaining that God's immutability is identical with God's essence. The motive is not grounded in semantic theory but rather in theology. Since the motive is strikingly evident in Augustine's writings, we can examine it after we have looked at Augustine's views.

II. Augustine on Accidents

There is a remarkable discussion of divine immutability in Book V of Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

But other things which are called essences or substances contain accidents, by which change, however great or small, comes about in them. But this kind of thing cannot happen to God, and therefore only this substance or essence, which God is, the source of his being, is unchangeable; whence [for it] to have been called 'essence' is fitting in the highest and truest degree. For that which is changed does not retain its own being; and that which can be changed, even if it be not changed, can be what it had not been. And because of this, that alone which not only does not change, but also cannot be changed at all, presents itself without hesitation as that which is most truly called 'being.'⁹

There are two claims embodied in this passage, whose conjunction implies that God is immutable. One is that any mutable thing has accidental properties which are somehow responsible for its mutability. The other is that God has no accidental properties. Both claims stand in need of justification.

Augustine would have regarded the first claim as quasi-definitional. Accidental properties are just what make a mutable thing mutable. As Augustine puts it slightly later,

in created and mutable things what is not said according to the substance remains to be said according to the accident. For all things happen by accident to them [*omnia enim accidunt eis*], which can be either lost or diminished—both quantities and qualities—along with what is said [in relation] to something—as friendships, relationships, servitudes, similitudes, equalities, and things of this kind—and positions, states, locations, times, actions, and passions.¹⁰

⁹ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, 2, 3. My translation is based on the Latin text printed in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Latinae Cursus Completus*, Vol. 42 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1861), p. 912.

¹⁰ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, 5, 6, in Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae*, p. 914.

The list is a famous one—the ten predicables canonized by Aristotle in the *Categories* (1^b25–2^a4) and the *Topics* (I, 9, 103^b20–24). Augustine’s maneuver is to lump together the nine categories other than substance, counting them all as accidents. So a thing can undergo two kinds of change, substantial change and accidental change. When it undergoes substantial change it either ceases to be the kind of thing it hitherto was or comes to be the kind of thing it hitherto was not. What is clearly not at issue in *De Trinitate* is whether God can undergo substantial change; qua necessary being, he cannot. When a thing undergoes accidental change it retains its identity as a substance while altering one or more of its accidental properties. Hence if God is mutable, he must have some accidental properties.

Augustine appears to ground the remarkable claim that God has no accidental properties in a chapter immediately preceding the passage just cited. The chapter consists of a discussion of different types and features of accidental properties. The discussion divides into three parts.

II.1 Inseparable Accidents

But an accident is not customarily spoken of except as that which can be lost by some change or other of the thing in which it inheres [*cui accidit*]. For although some things are called ‘inseparable accidents,’ which in Greek are labeled *achōrista*, as is the black color of a raven’s feathers, yet it loses this [color], not indeed as long as it is a feather, but because it is not always a feather. Hence the matter itself is changeable, and from the time when the animal or the feather ceases to be, and the entire body is changed and turned into earth, it also certainly loses that color.¹¹

Augustine believes that it is an accidental property of ravens’ feathers—hence, of ravens—that they are black. Nevertheless, ravens’ feathers remain black as long as they remain ravens’ feathers. Augustine got the notion of an inseparable accident either directly or indirectly from Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. Porphyry calls such accidents *achōrista*, and one of his examples is the color of a raven.¹² From Porphyry’s remarks we can identify the following features of inseparable accidents. (1) If *B* is an inseparable accident of *A*, then *B* is not an

¹¹ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, 4, 5, in Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae*, p. 913.

¹² Porphyry, *Isagoge*, 12.25–13.3, 21.20–22.9, in Adolfus Busse (ed.), *Porphyrii Isagoge et in Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium*, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, Vol. 4, Part 1 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1887).

essential attribute of *A*. That is, *B* is neither genus, difference, nor species of *A*. Let us say that *B* is *coterminously present in x* if and only if *B* is present in *x* for as long as *x* exists. Then we can add these positive features. (2) If *B* is an inseparable accident of *A*, then *B* is coterminously present in each specimen of *A*. (3) If *B* is an inseparable accident of *A*, then *B* is coterminously present (but not as an essential attribute) in every specimen of some species distinct from *A*. For example, blackness is an inseparable accident of both ravens and ebony.¹³ Feature (3) distinguishes inseparable accidents from *idia*. Moreover, although the notion of an *idion* left it an open question whether a thing's *idion* can be identical with that thing's essence, it cannot be that an inseparable accident is identical with a thing's essence. An inseparable accident is still an accident.

We can see why Augustine rejects the possibility of change in God with respect to an inseparable accident. In order for a thing to undergo a change in its inseparable accidents, if it has any, it must cease to be the kind of thing it is. Nothing short of substantial change is sufficient to bring about change in an inseparable accident. But God cannot undergo substantial change. Yet there is a lacuna in Augustine's argument. Recall that he set out to show that God has no accidental properties. All that the argument about inseparable accidents shows is that *if* God has any inseparable accidents, they will never be the locus of change. It takes another argument to show that God has no inseparable accidents.

II.2 Separable Accidents

And however much an accident is called what is separable, it is not lost by separation, but by change. Thus the blackness of men's hair is called a separable accident, since as long as the hair exists, it can become white. But on careful consideration it is clear enough that when it becomes white, [it does so] not by separation, as if something departed from the head—so that the blackness thence is severed by the emerging whiteness and goes somewhere—but at that place the quality of color is turned and changed.¹⁴

Some of the Pre-Socratics held views about change and the indestructibility of the "opposites" which encouraged the picture that the blackness of Smith's hair cannot have gone out of existence, even if Smith's hair is now white. Augustine rightly excoriates such a view, and offers an alternative analysis of

¹³ Porphyry, *Isagoge*, 22.7.

¹⁴ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, 4, 5, in Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae*, p. 913.

change involving separable accidents. Consider the descriptive phrase, “the color of Smith’s hair.” At one time it can refer to blackness; at another time to whiteness. At no single time does it refer to both blackness and whiteness. The latter fact is grounded in the observation that blackness and whiteness are *contraries*. So certain descriptive phrases can, depending on the time at which they are used, pick out contrary attributes in the same thing. The type of descriptive phrase that most obviously fills the bill is in the standard form, {the F-ness of x },¹⁵ but with the following proviso: let {F-ness} be a term which includes or can include contraries in its extension. Let us call this kind of descriptive phrase a *generic description*. “The color of Smith’s hair” is thus a generic description while “the snow-whiteness of Smith’s hair” is not.

Augustine may have seen that the descriptive phrases modeled most closely after “the color of Smith’s hair” but which apply with some plausibility to God are not generic descriptions. Consider, for example, “the clarity of God’s knowledge,” “the extent of God’s power,” “the intensity of God’s love.” A description like “the extent of Smith’s power” differs from “the color of Smith’s hair” in that while different uses of the latter can refer to contraries, different uses of the former can at most refer to different degrees of the selfsame property. If the extent of Smith’s power is to be able to lift objects weighing 100 pounds, then, barring bizarre counterexamples, we can say that Smith has the power to lift objects weighing 99 pounds, 98 pounds, and so on. Whatever the extent of Smith’s power, it includes or can include all lesser degrees, if we assume that degrees of power form a strict linear ordering. In contrast, if Smith’s hair is black, its blackness precludes its having any other color.

We need to identify another kind of descriptive phrase. Some properties like *being powerful* and *being knowledgeable* have degrees. For such a degreed property, *being F*, it is possible for one thing to be more or less *F* than another thing. Let us say that a *degreed description* is a descriptive phrase of the form {the F-ness of x } such that {F-ness} refers to a degreed property.

Descriptions like “the clarity of God’s knowledge,” “the extent of God’s power,” and “the intensity of God’s love” are degreed descriptions. Let us say that a descriptive phrase *varies in its reference* if two different uses of it refer either to contrary attributes in the same thing or to different degrees of a degreed property in the same thing. Theists generally insist that the degreed descriptions applicable to God never vary in their reference. God’s knowledge is not pellucid at one time and confused at another. Even though he exercises his power over an ever-changing cast of characters, he is always plenipotentary. His love does not wax or wane: the consuming fire of the Old Testament is the love incarnate of the New. Augustine must claim more than this, however. The

¹⁵ The braces function analogously to Quine’s quasi-quotes.

divine degreed descriptions not only do not vary in their reference; they also do not pick out any accidental property in God. The third part of Augustine's discussion of accidents helps to shed light on the issue.

II.3 Accidents with Degrees

Thus nothing is an accident in God, since nothing [in him] is changeable or capable of being lost. And if it seems proper for that to be called an accident, which although not lost, nevertheless is diminished or augmented (as is the life of the soul, for as long as the soul exists, so long does it live, and since the soul exists always, it always lives; but because it lives more fully when it is wise and less fully when it is without sense, even here some change or other occurs, not so that life is lacking, as wisdom is lacking in the fool, but so that it is less full), neither does something of this sort arise in God, since he remains altogether unchangeable.¹⁶

Augustine takes the dichotomy of separable and inseparable to be exhaustive of the class of accidents; he is not introducing a third kind of accidental property in this passage. He is instead calling our attention to a feature which Porphyry took to be common to all accidents—that they can be “diminished or augmented”; that is, that they have degrees.¹⁷ The inspiration for Porphyry's opinion may have been *Categories*, V, 3^b33–4^a9. Individual substances are not more or less the sorts of things they are: no person is more or less a person than any other person. But one person can be paler than another and wiser than he himself was before. There are two or three theses one might claim to find here. (1) No attribute which is essential to a (kind of) thing has degrees. (2) All attributes which are accidental to a (kind of) thing do have degrees. (3) All attributes of a (kind of) thing which have degrees are accidental. Theses (1) and (3) are equivalent if the dichotomy of essential and accidental is mutually exclusive in and collectively exhaustive of the class of attributes. Aristotle is committed to (1) and, I think, to (3). If quantities and relatives are accidents he must reject (2), for according to him, no quantities have degrees and some relatives have no degrees.¹⁸ (If quantities and relatives are not accidents, then our dichotomy is not collectively exhaustive, since they are not essential attributes either.) In any event it takes some adroit maneuvering to defend (2). Smith's

¹⁶ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, 4, 5, in Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae*, p. 913.

¹⁷ Porphyry, *Isagoge*, 17.6–8, 20.3–5, 21.15–17, 22.9–10.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Categories*, VI, 6^a19–25, 6^b19–27.

hair being this exact shade of snow-white is an accidental attribute of it, but the exact shade does not have degrees. Moreover, for those generic attributes, such as color, which have contraries, one would have to argue that the contraries are really degrees of some degreed property. We need not pursue these issues further. We can proceed on the assumption that Aristotle, Porphyry, and Augustine all accept (3) and at least a weakened version of (2); namely (2'), *some* attributes which are accidental to a (kind of) thing do have degrees.

The fact that *being powerful* is a degreed property explains why the descriptive phrase "the extent of Smith's power" can vary in its reference, and, if thesis (3) is correct, why Smith's being powerful to such-and-such an extent is an accidental property of Smith. What then explains—especially in light of these facts—why "the extent of God's power" cannot vary in its reference? And why does that descriptive phrase correspond to no accidental property in God? Many theists will rightly appeal to two conditions which shed light on the issues. The conditions do not, however, fully alleviate our puzzlement. We will eventually have to plunge on further.

The first condition is a *maximality* condition. It is not the case that God has some middling degree of power which remains the same for all time. It is rather that he has the maximum degree of power, omnipotence.¹⁹ Similar remarks hold for the other examples. His knowledge is not just clear enough to allow him to be quick at drawing inferences: it is so clear that he has no *need* of inferential procedures.²⁰ His love is so great that he gave his son so that we might have everlasting life; no one can have greater love (John 3:16, 15:13).

The maximality condition requires that the degreed description "the extent of God's power" refer to the maximal degree of the degreed property of *being powerful*. In this respect the description is unlike "the extent of Smith's power." Consider now the degreed property *being more or less round*. It has a maximal degree, *being perfectly circular*. But *being perfectly circular* is not itself a degreed property. In similar fashion, although *being powerful* is a degreed property, *being omnipotent* is not. In general, if a degreed property has a maximal degree, the maximal degree of the property is itself a property but not a degreed property. So even though on purely syntactical grounds "the extent of God's power" is a degreed description, it does not refer to something in God which is susceptible of degrees. According to the maximality condition, the description refers to God's omnipotence. Omnipotence is not the sort of thing that can be diminished or augmented, any more than perfect circularity can.

¹⁹ For further discussion, see William E. Mann, "The Divine Attributes," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12(1975): 151–159. Reprinted as Chapter 1 of this volume.

²⁰ See William E. Mann, "Epistemology Supernaturalized," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 436–456. Reprinted as Chapter 5 of this volume.

The maximality condition does not tell us *why* God enjoys the maximal degree of the property *being powerful*. Nor does it preclude the possibility that “the extent of God’s power” could vary in its reference by God’s being omnipotent at one time and not at another. The second theistic condition, intended to cut off the latter possibility, is a *stability* condition, which maintains that God’s omnipotence, omniscience, perfect love, and so on characterize him eternally. Of course, the stability condition itself cries out for justification. Moreover, what does all this have to do with Augustine’s denial of accidental properties in God?

III. Beyond Aristotle

What Philo and Augustine saw. Philo and Augustine never abandoned Aristotle’s theory of predication, even though they saw that the case of God’s immutability tested the resources of that theory. They used the theory to describe a being who, ironically, does not fit the metaphysical assumptions on which the theory rests. Aristotle’s theory applies most clearly to *substances*, the concrete individuals of our ordinary experience, of which biological specimens are the clearest examples. Such substances have essences (specified by genus and differentia), perhaps *idia*, and certainly accidents, the latter features being involved in accidental change and due, most typically, to the vagaries of the matter composing the substance.

God, however, is a metaphysically *simple* being, his simplicity being entailed by the notions that he is completely independent of and sovereign over all things. The following minimum core to the doctrine of God’s simplicity can be found in both Philo and Augustine.

- (A) God has no physical extension or spatial parts. If he did, he would not be simple, and he would be dependent on the parts for his being as he is.
- (B) God has no temporal parts. There are no stages to his career, no past, no future. Instead, he is eternal, enjoying the fullness of his life all at once.²¹
- (C) God has no accidental attributes.²²

Feature (A) excludes from God all accidental attributes whose exemplification requires embodiment. Feature (C) says something stronger than (A) if there are accidents whose exemplification does not require embodiment. It would be natural to think that, say, *knowing that Adam sinned* is just such an

²¹ Philo, *Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit*, 6, 32; Augustine, *Confessions*, XI, 11, 13; XI, 13, 16.

²² For discussion of Philo’s view, see Wolfson, *Philo*, pp. 101–107.

accident, exemplified by a purely spiritual God. I shall not defend the view here, but I believe that a defender of God's simplicity can argue cogently that although Adam's having sinned is contingent and God knows it, those facts do not confer an accidental property on God.²³

- (D) God has an essence, but his essence is not a combination of genus and differentia.²⁴ If it were, then he would be metaphysically complex and dependent on the genus and differentia for his being what he is.

We can see now that God's immutability is *overdetermined* by theses (B) and (C). A necessary condition for something's having changed is that it have temporally successive stages, but (B) denies that necessary condition of God. We have seen Augustine strive to make (C) palatable, and (C), in tandem with the thesis that change in God would require that he have accidental attributes, also yields the result that God is immutable.

Since God is a metaphysically simple being and ordinary substances are not, Aristotle's theory of predication does not apply to God in the ways it does to ordinary substances. But Philo and Augustine do not regard the theory as a Wittgensteinian ladder to be thrown away after one has climbed beyond it. If an analogy is wanted, it is more as if the theory is a set of mechanic's tools, perfectly adequate for taking apart and putting together ordinary mechanisms but useful at best only in beginning to diagnose and repair a computer.

What Philo saw. An uncharitable interpretation of the doctrine of God's simplicity delineated in theses (A)–(D) would have it that the simplicitist's God is an inert, impersonal, abstract object, confirming the worst of Tertullian's fears.²⁵ But Philo did not stop with theses (A)–(D). Early in the *Legum Allegoria*, Philo says that

... God never ceases acting, but just as the *idion* of fire is to burn and [the *idion*] of snow is to chill, so [the *idion*] of God is to act [*poiein*]. And indeed much more so, inasmuch as he is the source of action to other beings.²⁶

²³ See William E. Mann, "Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), pp. 343–353.

²⁴ This is another implication of Philo's calling God to *genikôtaton*. See also Saint Augustine, *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 14, 24. In *De Trinitate*, VII, 5, 10, Augustine argues that God is more properly called an essence than a substance, since substances are metaphysically complex.

²⁵ Statements of Neo-Tertullianism on this score can be found in W. Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960–1961) pp. 87–108, esp. 99–101; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in Clifton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (eds.), *God and the Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 181–203; and Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 211–222.

²⁶ Philo, *Legum Allegoria*, I, 3, 5, in *Philo*, Vol. 1, pp. 148, 150.

And in *De Cherubim* Philo adds that "... the *idion* of God is to act, which is not ascribed with justice to what is created, since [the *idion*] of what is created is to be acted upon."²⁷

God does not just happen to be active if his *idion* is to act. God's being active is entailed by his essence, just as his immutability is. Moreover, if to act is God's *idion*, then to act is his exclusive prerogative. Philo does not think that it follows that humans are feckless: the verb *poiein* conveys the notion of metaphysically *creative* activity, a kind of activity which Philo can claim to be strictly specific to God.

So Philo believes that God is active and that God's being active is compatible with God's being unchangeable—in general, is compatible with theses (A)–(D). What Philo saw, then, is that an utterly immutable being can also be supremely active. It follows, of course, that such a being's activity cannot be sequential. God does not first command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, wait to see what steps Abraham takes, and then remit the command. God's activity has sequential effects on Abraham and Isaac, but the activity itself is not sequential. A closer approximation to the divine perspective would be to say that there is one vast, single, nonsuccessive activity of God's which has as part of its content that Abraham is commanded at t_1 to sacrifice Isaac, that Abraham takes such-and-such steps in the interval t_1 – t_n , and that Abraham is commanded not to sacrifice Isaac at t_n . The command not to sacrifice postdates the command to sacrifice, but the activity which is God's commanding not to sacrifice does not postdate the activity which is God's commanding to sacrifice. There is numerical diversity and temporal succession in Abraham's actions and in what happens to Abraham but none in God's action.²⁸

What Augustine saw. To say that immutability and creative activity are *idia* of God is not to say that they are the same *idion* nor that they are identical with God's essence. Nevertheless, there is motivation to make these identifications. Suppose that immutability and creative activity are distinct and that they supervene on God's essence. Then God would have at least three metaphysical components, his essence, his immutability, and his activity. He would thus depend on these components for his being as he is, and the components would not depend on him. The point is not, say, that God could have had the essence he has and not be immutable. If immutability is an *idion* of God's essence, then it is a *necessary* entailment of God's essence. Nor does the point depend on the claim

²⁷ Philo, *De Cherubim*, 24, 77, in *Philo*, Vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 54.

²⁸ For further discussion of related issues, see William E. Mann, "Simplicity and Immutability in God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983), pp. 267–276. Reprinted as Chapter 3 of this volume.

that God might have had a different essence. We can assume for present purposes that the latter claim is necessarily false. It is rather that if there were any kind of compositional complexity in God at all, then God would be a metaphysical *compositum*, a unified whole, to be sure, but a whole nevertheless constituted of metaphysical elements. But any *compositum* depends on its elements for its being as it is. The elements are prior in analysis (if not in time) to the *compositum* itself. So if God were a *compositum*, then he would depend on his elements for his being as he is. It seems natural to say in turn that the elements would not depend on God for their existence or nature. Thus if God is a metaphysical *compositum*, then he is neither sovereign over all things nor independent of all things.

In *De Trinitate* Augustine denies the possibility of any kind of metaphysical complexity in God:

God indeed is truly spoken of in many ways as great, good, wise, blessed, true, and whatever else is seen as not unworthily said [of him]. But he is the same as his greatness, which is wisdom—for he is not great by means of bulk, but by means of power—and the same as goodness, which is wisdom and greatness, and the same as truth, which is all these. And in him it is not one thing to be blessed and another to be great, or wise, or true, or to be good, or to be altogether himself.²⁹

Augustine is putting forward, in effect, a stronger version of thesis (D): (D') God has an essence, but his essence is not a combination of genus and differentia, does not contain a plurality of attributes, and is not something distinct from God himself. Two notorious consequences flow from Augustine's doctrine. All the attributes essential to God are identical and God's nature or essence just *is* God. If God is essentially immutable and essentially creative, then his being immutable and his being creative are not two different attributes. That in virtue of which God is immutable is identical with that in virtue of which God is creative. It is harmless enough to call immutability and creative activity *idia* of God, as long as we realize that they are the same *idion*. Moreover, that in virtue of which God is immutable and creatively active just is God's essence; his essence is identical with his immutability and his creative activity. Finally, God's essence *is* God. As Augustine puts it in *The City of God*, God is what he *has*.³⁰ To be God just is to be (not: to instantiate) the essence that is immutable, great, good, wise, blessed, true, and creatively active.

²⁹ Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, 7, 8. For other expressions of this doctrine of God's simplicity, see V, 10, 11–V, 11, 12; VII, 2, 2; VIII, 0, 1; XV, 5, 7–XV, 6, 9.

³⁰ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, XI, 10.

When it comes to the case of God, then, Augustine is committed to the view that idionic predication is a matter of identity with essence rather than supervenience. Moreover, Augustine's doctrines allow him to resolve two issues raised at the end of section II. Recall that the stability condition maintains that God is eternally omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly loving, and the like. What justifies the stability condition, by Augustine's lights, is that God's being eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly loving are not different factors of God. To be God is to be omnipotent, which is to be eternal, which is thus to be eternally omnipotent. Finally, we can see now that Augustine's strategy in discussing God's immutability is a kind of pincer movement. The lower jaw consists of the discussion of separable, inseparable, and degreed accidents, which suggests, inductively, that it is not at all obvious that God has any accidental properties. The upper jaw is the doctrine of God's metaphysical simplicity, which entails that God has no accidental properties because he has no metaphysical complexity.

This is not the occasion to mount a full-scale defense of what are clearly some difficult philosophical doctrines. It may be useful, however, to look briefly at one critical question that arises naturally from our discussion and see what resources we have to answer it.

If being immutable is an *idion* of God and is identical with God's essence, how can it be that God's essence explains (or would explain) his being immutable but not vice versa? How can there be explanatory asymmetry where there is identity?

It is a familiar enough fact that explanatory contexts are opaque. Substitution of identicals for identicals need not preserve the explanatory correctness of an explanans. Suppose that the chairperson of the department is the department's leading authority on Pre-Socratic philosophy. Then Jones has a valid job offer from the department because the chairperson signed the contract. It is not the case that Jones has a valid offer because the department's leading authority on Pre-Socratic philosophy signed the contract. To bring the case closer to the case of divine essence and divine immutability we need to suppose that Smith is the department's chairperson *because* she is the department's leading authority on the Pre-Socratics. (Members of the department, rapt in admiration of the Pre-Socratics, traditionally acclaim their foremost expert as chairperson. Smith's chief rival is now frantically working on a paper on Anaxagoras.) So Smith is chairperson of the department because she is its leading authority on the Pre-Socratics. It is not the case that she is the department's leading authority because she is its chairperson. Standard explanatory asymmetry is present, even though an identity is also.

Still, one may wonder whether explanatory opacity is present in cases in which the identities are necessary. The bizarre selection practices of Smith's

colleagues are a matter of contingent fact. It is only a historical accident that the chairperson of the department is the department's leading authority on the Pre-Socratics. The doctrine of divine simplicity demands that the identity between God's essence and God's immutability be necessary. How can there be opacity and explanatory asymmetry where there is necessary identity?

There are attractive views about the interconnections between reference, necessity, and identity which entail that this liquid's being water is necessarily identical with this liquid's being composed of H_2O . The liquid's being water and its being composed of H_2O are not two features of the liquid but (necessarily) one feature referred to in two ways. Nevertheless, this liquid's being composed of H_2O explains why the liquid is water, not vice versa. So there is nothing to prevent certain kinds of necessary identities from providing identicals which stand in the asymmetrical relation of explanans to explanandum.

Theists who are moved by the consideration that God, qua perfect being, should be metaphysically independent of and sovereign over all things can thus embrace many of the doctrines championed by Philo and Augustine without thereby falling into immediate and obvious philosophical error. Of course there may be less obvious philosophical error to which they are susceptible. And if Tertullian is right, such theists make the obvious error of worrying about making philosophical error. There are thus two types of possible liabilities inherent in the agenda set by Philo and Augustine. Whether the possible liabilities are actual liabilities are issues to be tackled in another arena.

Epistemology Supernaturalized

How, it might be asked, could one *stipulate* that something be contingently true? . . . Surely only God, if even He, could perform the miracle of stipulating how the world shall be.

—Keith Donnellan

We all know that God knows all there is to know. How does he do it? Perhaps God alone knows how he knows. Why should we care?

Some epistemologists have insisted that the question whether a person can be rightly said to know something cannot be isolated from the question how the purported item of knowledge was produced in that person. If they are correct, then to say that God knows everything without explaining how he can know anything is whistling in the dark. The problem is compounded by the fact that traditional theists have insisted that God does not know things in the way(s) in which we know things, thus preventing the straightforward application of human cognitive psychology to God. It is possible, of course, for theists both to deny the claim made by naturalistic epistemologists and to insist that our knowledge of God's knowledge must walk the confines of a *via negativa*. Their case, however, would gain plausibility if it could be shown that strolls down *viae positivae* always result in intellectual muggings. It is the aim of this chapter to explore one positive account of how God knows which is free from philosophical fear.

In the first section of this chapter I shall explore the reasons why theists have insisted that God's knowledge is different from ours. In sections II and III I shall develop and examine an account of God's knowledge whose major ingredients are to be found in Question 14 of the First Part of St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. Although I have provided translations in the appendix to this chapter of three of the more important passages from Question 14, I shall not be engaged in close textual analysis, and it would not distress me to find out that my account does not square entirely with Aquinas'. In all sorts of ways my exposition will be clearly anachronistic.

I am more interested in defensibility of thesis than fidelity to Thomas. Finally, the account will be partial at best. It will deal only with God's knowledge of contingent fact. I shall not consider the problems of whether and how God knows necessary truths¹ or counterfactual conditionals.² As for future contingent facts—in particular, facts concerning the future free choices of persons—it will be a corollary of the account that from God's point of view, none of them are future, although many of them are free.

I. How God Does Not Know

Jones ate a bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich for lunch last Thursday. Now how could you, a normal human being with standard human cognitive devices and capacities, come to know this fact? There seem to be three possible ways. (1) You accept the testimony of a reliable agent (Jones' friend Smith, who had lunch with him last Thursday) or device (an FBI camera, set in place as part of PORKSCAM). (2) You infer the fact from your prior knowledge of other facts and generalities, such as Jones' tastes, the restaurant he went to, and so forth. (3) You were there: you witnessed him eating the BLT.

I believe that (1), (2), and (3) exhaust the possibilities. Of course different epistemologists will clamor to tell us that some one of these ways reduces to one of the others—(1) to (2), perhaps, or (3) to (2)—but our present concern is not that these categories be *exclusive* but rather *exhaustive*. Moreover, these ways are *ordinary* ways of acquiring knowledge of contingent fact. I am ruling out extraordinary ways, such as your knowledge of Jones' BLT consumption being innate or acquired by a feat of precognition. If you know about Jones' BLT in one of those ways, then you are equipped with some nonstandard cognitive capacities. (I shall return to these issues later.)

There are well-known traditional theological grounds for denying that God knows about Jones' BLT in any of ways (1), (2), or (3). Concerning method (1), if God's knowledge were acquired by accepting testimony, then he would be dependent upon the agent or device in question for part of his knowledge. However, God is supposed to be a perfectly independent being, existing *a se*,

¹ See Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 15–26; Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), pp. 92–140. William Alston has pointed out to me that the account which I give of how God knows contingent matters involves items of knowledge, such as God's self-knowledge, which are themselves necessary. There is no sound argument, however, from "God necessarily knows himself" to "Anything that God knows is necessary."

² See Robert Merrihew Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977), pp. 109–117.

upon whom all other things depend.³ Offered the choice of either giving up the thesis of divine aseity or the application of method (1) to God, theists will abandon the latter.

Laplace's Demon, a being who deductively infers all subsequent states of a deterministic universe from his knowledge of its laws of nature and some of its earlier states, is a splashy example of a being who obtains knowledge by method (2). Ordinary mortals, who make all sorts of garden-variety inductive inferences on the basis of more or less adequate evidence, provide a less dramatic example. We might be inclined to think that inductive inferences are somehow beneath God's dignity; more to the point, that since inductive inferences involve a loss in transfer of certainty, a truly omniscient being cannot be required to depend on them. But what is there to prevent God from acquiring some knowledge of contingent fact deductively? We do not have to assume that the universe is totally deterministic to allow for this possibility. Nor is it obvious that the objection used against ascribing method (1) to God applies here. If God is able to deduce that Jones ate a BLT last Thursday from other facts and laws, then one might argue that this new piece of knowledge does not depend on the other facts and laws but rather on God's knowledge of them.

Nevertheless, traditional theists rejected the idea that God knew anything by deduction. Aquinas, for example, regards deductive inference as a kind of "discursive" knowledge, which cannot apply to God.⁴ There is a difference between the notion of logical consequence and the activity of drawing a consequence: although it is tempting to say that the former is not a temporal phenomenon, the latter is. It is clear that God cannot acquire knowledge by drawing consequences, whether he is temporal or timeless. For if he is timeless he cannot participate in a temporal process. And if he is a temporal being, then if he is genuinely *acquiring* knowledge of Q by deducing Q from P and $P \rightarrow Q$, then there was a time at which he did not know that Q . And if that is so, then there was a time at which God was not omniscient. Hence if God is essentially omniscient, he cannot acquire knowledge of anything by deduction.

Aquinas' doctrine goes further than this, however. Not only is the drawing of consequences precluded from God's knowledge, but so also is there being logical consequences in God's knowledge. God is supposed to know all things with equal immediacy; his knowledge of Q , then, must be direct and not mediated by or conditional upon his knowledge of $P \rightarrow Q$ and P . Qua omniscient, he knows that $P \rightarrow Q$, that P , that Q , and that Q is a consequence of $P \rightarrow Q$

³ See Plantinga, *Does God*.

⁴ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 14, a. 7. Hereafter, this work is abbreviated as "ST." I am indebted to Norman Kretzmann for deepening my understanding of this part of Aquinas' doctrine.

and *P*: nevertheless, his knowledge of *Q* cannot depend on other items of his knowledge. We can view Aquinas' doctrine as an extension of the doctrine of God's aseity. In addition to requiring that God be independent of all other things, the doctrine requires that no part or aspect of God be dependent on any other part or aspect. One may wonder whether this extension of the doctrine of God's aseity is a coherent demand. I believe that it is, but I shall defer discussion of its coherence until section III.

Perhaps, then, God knows about Jones' BLT by means of method (3)? He was there—after all, he is supposed to be everywhere—so he must have seen Jones consume the BLT. Waiving any difficulties we may have with the doctrine of God's omnipresence, we may still wonder how his "being there" helps us to understand how he knows about Jones' gustatory feat. Theists will hasten to insist that God did not literally *see* Jones eat the BLT. God has no body and hence no organs of sense; he is a purely spiritual being. To say that God sees Jones eat the BLT is to speak metaphorically,⁵ akin to saying that Smith sees the point of Jones' strange behavior. We should say rather that God understands, by some sort of direct, immediate mental intuition, that Jones ate the BLT. This maneuver, however, does nothing to answer the question how God knows; it merely postpones it. Instead of "How does God know?" we now have "How does God understand?"

The force of the question can be brought out in the following way. It is very tempting to think that all three ways of standard human knowledge acquisition—(1), (2), and (3)—involve some sort of causal connection between fact and knower. In reverse order: (3) If you witnessed Jones eating the BLT, then you were obviously causally *en rapport* with (some of) the sequence of events which constituted Jones' eating a BLT. (That you are now genuinely remembering having witnessed Jones eating a BLT must also be accounted for in causal terms.) (2) Your inference that Jones ate a BLT, if it is justified at all, must depend on premises which refer to causal antecedents of Jones' eating the BLT or, in the case of retrodictive inference, causal consequences of Jones' eating the BLT. (1) Rational agent that you are, you would not base your belief about Jones on the testimony of an agent or mechanism which you had no reason to believe was causally connected to Jones in any way.

There is a strong tendency to think, then, that human knowledge of contingent fact requires that there be some causal connection between fact and knower. Consider the alternative: try seriously to conceive of Smith's genuinely knowing that Jones ate a BLT last Thursday yet with Smith's knowledge being causally insulated from Jones' eating the BLT; that is, there being no causal chain, of however many links, connecting the fact to Smith's knowledge

⁵ *ST*, Ia, q. 3, a. 1.

of it. I suggest that the longer you try, the less intelligible the project will seem to you. One does not need to be prepared to defend a causal theory of knowledge in order to accept this point. One need not, for example, claim that causation must be built into the very analysis of knowledge, nor need one know how to sort out the causal chains which transmit knowledge from the twisted chains (typically forged by philosophers) which do not.⁶ Nor need one worry, for our purposes, about squaring mathematical knowledge with a causal theory.

As indirect support for the thesis that human knowledge of contingent fact must somehow be causally related to the fact, consider our attitude toward the possibility of one's knowing a contingent fact in one of the extraordinary ways mentioned earlier. No nativist of my ken would want to claim that our specimen fact about Jones's BLT is a piece of innate knowledge. Suppose, however, that some more dignified, more interesting, more basic contingent facts are known innately. Surely we would seek an explanation as to why that knowledge is "wired in." Perhaps God in his wisdom saw fit to make it so. Or perhaps the knowledge in question has such a survival value that ancestors in our species (or in species antecedent to our species) who did not possess it died off. In any case the explanation will be satisfactory only if it specifies a causal medium—in our examples, God, or natural selection—which links fact to knowledge.

For people who have taken the possibility of precognition seriously, the difference between one's merely having a premonition of a future event and one's having precognitive knowledge of it lies precisely in there being the right kind of causal connection between future event and present awareness of it. Thus the case for (and perhaps also against) the possibility of precognition hinges on the possibility of retrograde causation: rather than give up the claim to knowledge by precognition, precognitivists would jettison the thesis that a cause must temporally precede its effect.⁷

It would be interesting to investigate the thesis further,⁸ but I shall not do so here. It is enough for our purposes that we see how the thesis is initially plausible and tempting.⁹ For to the extent to which we find it plausible, it underscores the

⁶ For a discussion of the problems, see Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 167–196.

⁷ See Paul Meehl, "Precognitive Telepathy," *Nous*, 12 (1978), pp. 235–266, 371–395.

⁸ For example, if there are uncaused events, how can we have knowledge of them? (By their effects; how else?) Or how, if the thesis is correct, can we have knowledge of negative existential facts? How can I know that Santa Claus does not exist? On this question, see Keith Donnellan, "Speaking of Nothing," *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (1974), pp. 3–31.

⁹ Aquinas believes it to be true: "The assimilation [between knower and thing known] in human cognition is brought about by the action of sensible things upon the human cognitive powers. . . ." Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 65.

difference between our knowledge and God's, according to a traditional theological doctrine. The great medieval theologians, for example, held the opinion that God's knowledge is uncaused by anything distinct from God. In particular, the contingent events and facts of the world do not cause God to have knowledge of them.¹⁰ The doctrine is a corollary of the doctrine of God's aseity. If God's knowledge of contingent states of affairs were caused by the states of affairs themselves, then God would be dependent on them for his knowing what he knows. Therefore he cannot know about contingent states of affairs by being on the receiving end of a causal chain, no matter how few links it might possess.

So now it appears that the avenue to knowledge upon which humans must travel is closed to God. How, then, does he get there?

II. "God's Knowledge Is the Cause of Things"

A. *What things?* "God's knowledge is the cause of things," says Aquinas in *ST*, Ia, q. 14, a. 8. The gambit is hardly surprising in light of the previous discussion: God's knowledge cannot be the effect of things, so reverse the causality and make his knowledge the cause of things. As articulated so far, the gambit can easily be declined. First, it is simply no answer to the question "How does God know contingent facts?" Aquinas rejects the propriety of the question if it is interpreted as a request for the pedigree of God's knowledge. Even so, another aspect of the question lingers; namely, *in what way* does God know contingent facts? What is God's knowledge of contingent fact like? Is there any province on the map of human experience which is close to God's knowledge of contingent fact? Second, it might be that God's knowledge is the cause of things, under some suitable interpretation of that slogan, but could it nevertheless happen that he does not *know* that his knowledge is the cause? His knowing that *P* would seem to be distinct from his knowing that his knowledge of *P* is the cause of *P*, yet *qua* omniscient, he must possess both items of knowledge. How does he possess the second-order item?

There is more to Aquinas' strategy than the opening gambit, but the gambit itself merits further examination. "God's knowledge is the cause of things" has two interpretations; depending on whether we take "thing" (*res*) to mean *entity* or *situation*:

- (A) For any contingent entity, *x*, God's knowledge of *x* is the cause of *x*'s existence.

¹⁰ An influential text for this doctrine was Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.13.22; see, e.g., *ST*, Ia, q. 14, a. 8.

- (B) For any contingent situation, *S*, God's knowledge of *S* is the cause of *S*'s being the case.

Aquinas certainly has (A) in mind, but it is hard to see how he can resist (B), for God is supposed to know not only what exists but also whatever is true of what exists, and there is no indication in Aquinas' writings that he sees these as issues requiring separate treatment.

Moreover, I believe that Aquinas subsumes (B) under (A). That is, what I have been calling a situation is regarded by Aquinas as a kind of *res*. Aquinas accepts the thesis that *verum* and *ens* are convertible terms (*ST*, Ia, q. 16, a. 3), which surely licenses him in thinking that for a proposition to be true is just for the world to be in a certain way, the way the proposition indicates. But a proposition is not a "sentence radical" or a function from possible worlds to truth values or any similar sort of abstract object. Against the *antiqui Nominales*, who held that "Christ is being born," "Christ will be born," and "Christ has been born" express the same proposition since they refer to the same thing—namely, the nativity of Christ—Aquinas, citing Aristotle as authority (*Categories*, 5.4^a 22ff.), holds a view about propositions which maintains that they can change their truth values through time (*ST*, Ia, q. 14, a. 15, *ad* 3). "Socrates is sitting" is a proposition which is true whenever Socrates is sitting and false otherwise. ("Socrates is sitting" is thus not necessarily elliptical for "Socrates is sitting at t_1 .") Although Aquinas objects to the *Nominales* saying that "Socrates is sitting" and "Socrates was sitting" refer to the *same* thing, his objection in no way hinges on his denying that they refer to *things*. Now the things to which they most plausibly refer are situations.¹¹ So at *ST*, Ia, q. 16, a. 8, *ad* 4 Aquinas says that Socrates' sitting (*sessio Socratis*) is the cause of the truth of the proposition "Socrates is sitting" (*Socrates sedet*); that is, the situation, *the sitting of Socrates*, is a thing whose existence makes the proposition "Socrates is sitting" true.

The willingness to count contingent situations as things is encouraged by Aristotle's fourfold ontological inventory, introduced in the *Categories* (2.1^a 20ff.), which includes things which are "in a subject but not said of any subject." The stock example of such a thing is the individual whiteness of some body, e.g., Socrates' body. The whiteness of Socrates is the unique, unrepeatable instance of the quality, whiteness, which inheres in Socrates. Notice that just as *albedo Socratis* is the most natural translation of "the whiteness of Socrates," so "*sessio Socratis*" is the most natural translation of "the sitting of

¹¹ It is natural to think that Socrates' sitting differs from Christ's being born in respect of the former's repeatability. Socrates can sit on several occasions; perhaps Christ can only be born once. The difference, if it is a difference, has no bearing on the present issues.

Socrates” or “Socrates’ sitting.” Thus on the Aristotelian scheme of things, at least in cases where “ x is F ” is a contingently true sentence, “the F -ness of x ” refers to a thing as much as “ x ” does.¹²

In sum, the thesis that God’s knowledge is the cause of things includes situations within the scope of “things.”

B. *How can knowledge be a cause?* In particular, in what way is God’s knowledge the cause of things? A second thesis which can be extracted from *ST*, Ia, q. 14, a. 8 is that God’s knowledge is the cause of things in the way in which a craftsman’s knowledge is the cause of his handiwork. The kind of knowledge by which the craftsman produces his handiwork is practical knowledge, which Aquinas wishes to distinguish from speculative knowledge. The discussion in *ST*, Ia, q. 14, a. 16 suggests how the distinction is supposed to go. A person who has speculative knowledge has knowledge, to some degree, about what is, what can be, and what must be. In reporting on a person’s speculative knowledge in a particular domain, we would typically list the most salient propositions comprising that person’s knowledge. Aquinas thinks of speculative knowledge as forming, ideally, an explanatory hierarchy: the goal of speculative knowledge is the unification and explanation of our experience. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge of how to do and bring about. A list of a person’s practical knowledge would not be a list of propositions; it would be a repertoire. The items in a person’s repertoire will usually be talents and skills, not mere abilities. The former come about in the ordinary course of events by training and habituation; the latter need not. (In virtue solely of being anatomically normal, a person has the ability to kick a soccer ball. He may nevertheless not be especially skilled at kicking soccer balls.)

Of course the two kinds of knowledge are interwoven. An expert in dendrology has speculative knowledge about what constitutes an elm tree and

¹² Although not an independently existing thing. It is part of Aristotle’s doctrine that the F -ness of x depends on x for its existence but not conversely. I leave aside the question whether the doctrine can be extended to cover cases of necessarily true propositions, save to mention one special case. Aquinas maintains that the object of faith, viz., God, is simple in itself, but that the object of faith, i.e., the content of the believer’s belief, is something complex, in the form of a proposition. (See *ST*, IIaIIae, q. 1, a. 2. See also Gabriel Nuchelmans, *Theories of the Proposition: Ancient and Medieval Conceptions of the Bearers of Truth and Falsity* [Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1973], p. 185.) The thesis we have been discussing sheds light on the doctrine of God’s simplicity. In saying that God is simple Aquinas means, inter alia, that the terms “God” and “the omniscience of God,” although not synonymous, necessarily refer to the same thing. The proposition “God is omniscient” is compounded of two nonsynonymous terms, as is the proposition “Socrates is white.” But whereas Socrates and Socrates’ whiteness are two distinct things, God and God’s omniscience are not. “God is omniscient” is to be parsed as “Necessarily, God = the omniscience of God.” (I discuss the doctrine of divine simplicity in Section III.) Here, then, is another case in which “the F -ness of x ” refers to a thing, with the following twist: the thing it refers to just is (necessarily) x .

what constitutes a beech tree. But in virtue of possessing the speculative knowledge, the expert can sort out elms from beeches. Although interwoven, speculative and practical knowledge can be separated. A child may know how to ride a bicycle without having any speculative knowledge of rotational kinematics. Chicken sexers are notoriously unable to explain how they are successful; the twist in this case is that no one else is able to account for their success either. And, to go in the other direction, having read a how-to-do-it manual, I might have some low-level speculative knowledge about brazing copper tubing yet not know how to braze copper tubing. (The difference between the passive and the infinitive is revealing. I can know how copper tubing is brazed without knowing how to braze copper tubing.) In light of these facts it seems unlikely that either kind of knowledge can be reduced or assimilated to the other.

The craftsman produces his handiwork in virtue of exercising a skill or set of skills which he possesses. But it is not the mere possession of the skills which results in the production. There must in addition be an act of will: it is the builder abuilding who builds, not the builder dormant. "The same science covers opposites," and because of that fact, mere possession of the skills does not issue in production. The slogan, as it applies to practical knowledge, has two interpretations:

- (C) If x knows how to ϕ (bring about S), then in virtue of that knowledge, x has the ability to ϕ (bring about S) and x has the ability to forbear from ϕ ing (bringing about S).
- (D) If x knows how to ϕ (bring about S), then in virtue of that knowledge, x has the ability to bring about beneficial states of affairs related to the activity of ϕ ing (bringing about S) and x has the ability to bring about harmful states of affairs related to the activity of ϕ ing (bringing about S).

It might be said that a magnet has the ability to move iron filings, but even so, the magnet does not have the ability not to move iron filings. So, according to (C), the magnet does not know how to move iron filings. There is no "science" in the magnet since its behavior cannot "cover opposites" or be other than what it is.

Whereas (C) rules out the ascription of practical knowledge to beings which are incapable of behaving voluntarily, (D) is designed to capture the sentiment displayed in the adage that who knows best how to cure knows best how to kill. The opposites "covered" by the science of medicine are beneficial and harmful states of affairs of the sort having to do with health, which, to the extent to which they can be voluntarily induced at all, require the exercise of the practical knowledge of medicine. Other examples illustrating (D) are easy

to come by. The lawyer, the CPA, and the computer programmer are all familiar cases of people whose practical knowledge gives them the potential for doing sophisticated sorts of good and evil.

The ascription of practical knowledge to God is not just like its ascription to humans, although the differences are not the source of any mystery.

- (1) Any human's repertoire, no matter how impressive, is limited, both with respect to other humans and with respect to God. John McEnroe is no concert pianist; Vladimir Ashkenazy is no tennis professional. Moreover, even the most impressive of human repertoires pales in comparison to God's. The message from the great speeches in the Book of Job is not merely "anything you can do, I can do better." It is also "I can do things no human could ever do." In fact, the natural view is to regard God as possessing all practical knowledge and to take this as an entailment of his omniscience and omnipotence.
- (2) God must have all practical knowledge without having acquired any of it. He does not learn his skills by practice, training, or habituation; for there could not have been a time at which he lacks them. Nor could there be a time at which he loses one of his skills. These claims are straightforward entailments of the doctrine that God is essentially perfect. To lose or to gain a skill implies the existence of a time at which one does not have the skill, and at that time, at least, one is not perfect.
- (3) With humans it sometimes happens that skill and will are not sufficient for success; circumstances must cooperate to provide the opportunity. Julia Child may know how to prepare sole Florentine, and she may want to prepare sole Florentine, but without spinach her cause is lost. With God, we are told, things are otherwise. His will is unimpedible, a consequence of his sovereignty over all things.
- (4) Principle (D) implies that God has the ability to do all manner of harmful things, and although not all harmful things are evil, some are, and so principle (D) seems to imply that God can do evil if he has all practical knowledge. Like thesis (B), then, (D) raises a problem about the connection between God and evil. There are three basic approaches one can take to this issue. (a) Say that God can do evil, in just the same sense that humans can do evil. Perhaps he never *does* evil or has *need* of doing evil, but he can nevertheless, and so (D) is not at all troublesome. (b) Say that he simply cannot do evil, even though he is omnipotent, and if (D) implies that he can, then there is something wrong with (D). This theme has two major variations. (b') No matter what God did, it would be good; his very doing it would

make it good. (b*) The “ability” to do evil is no genuine ability at all, but rather a liability or deficiency. Surface grammar misleads us: “God can do evil” is better assimilated to “Jones can die” than to “Jones can play the *Waldstein* Sonata.” (c) Say that he can and cannot do evil and hence that there must be at least two senses to the sentence “God can do evil,” one sense which renders (D) true, and another sense which pays respects to the doctrine of God’s impeccability.¹³ The solution to this problem is left as an exercise for the reader.

C. *Whither human freedom? Scientia Dei est causa rerum.* The insertion of the definite article in the translation of this sentence (God’s knowledge is *the* cause of things) is well-nigh irresistible but potentially misleading. The Latin allows an indefinite-article translation: “God’s knowledge is *a* cause of things.” The use of the definite article suggests that God’s knowledge is the *only* cause of things, which would preclude the causal efficacy of other agents. Calvin Normore spots a dilemma here:

Either God’s creative activity is a sufficient condition for my choosing to sin, in which case he can foreknow it but it is not clear that my choice is both free and efficacious, or God’s creative activity is a necessary but not a sufficient condition, in which case it is not easy to see how knowledge of it alone constitutes foreknowledge.¹⁴

(Normore’s dilemma can be modified to exclude reference to foreknowledge.) Normore suggests that Aquinas grasps the first horn. I agree. I believe that Aquinas’ position is that God’s knowledge of Jones’ free, contingent action is causally sufficient for its occurring and that God’s knowledge of it and Jones’ choosing or willing it are individually necessary for its being free.

One locus for Aquinas’ views is *ST*, Ia, q. 83, a. 1. I believe that Aquinas’ position is this: if x is a person and A is an action, then x is free to do A if and only if (1) x can choose to do A and x can choose not to do A , and (2) x chooses to do A or not to do A as a result of rational judgment. But my having the choice to do A in my power is not causally sufficient for my doing A (or omitting to do A): God’s cooperation is necessary (*ad* 2 and 4). I do A freely only if

¹³ See Nelson Pike, “Omnipotence and God’s Ability to Sin,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 6 (1969), pp. 208–216.

¹⁴ Calvin Normore, “Future Contingents,” in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 366.

my choosing to do *A* is in my power, but my choosing to do *A* is not causally sufficient for my doing *A*, and God's activity is causally necessary for my doing *A*.

Aquinas says that "free choice is the [a?] cause of its own movement, since man moves himself to act through free choice"; yet that God, "... by moving voluntary causes, does not prevent their [ensuing] actions from being voluntary, but rather he brings about this thing in them; for he operates in each thing according to its nature" (*ST*, Ia, q. 83, a. 1, *ad* 3). The first passage, I submit, amounts to saying that my freely choosing to do *A* is a cause of those subsequent actions which achieve the doing of *A*. In any event, the first passage is supposed to be compatible with the second one. God's activity moves, i.e., is the efficient cause of, my freely choosing to do *A*, yet my freely choosing to do *A* is something that is in my power. How can this be so?

By distinguishing logically necessary and sufficient conditions from causally necessary and sufficient conditions, we can sort out four theses:

- (1) God's knowing is logically necessary: If I freely choose to do *A*, then God knows that I freely choose to do *A*.
- (2) God's knowing is logically sufficient: If God knows that I freely choose to do *A*, then I freely choose to do *A*.
- (3) God's knowing is causally necessary: My freely choosing to do *A* would not occur if God's knowing it did not occur.
- (4) God's knowing is causally sufficient: God's knowing that I freely choose to do *A* is all that is needed to bring about my freely choosing to do *A*.

We may take (2) to be true in virtue of the analysis of the concept of knowledge. Suitably generalized, (1) is one way of stating the thesis that God is omniscient, and it is precisely that thesis which we are trying to understand. I think that Aquinas is committed to both theses (3) and (4): they are entailments, respectively, of God's sovereignty and independence. So God's knowing that I freely choose to do *A* is a causally necessary and sufficient condition for my freely choosing to do *A*. My freely choosing to do *A* implies that I have it in my power to choose not to do *A*. So God's knowing that I freely choose to do *A* implies that I have it in my power to choose not to do *A*; if I did not have it in my power, God could not know that I *freely* choose to do *A*. If I have it in my power to choose not to do *A*, then God has it in his power to actualize a possible world in which I choose not to do *A*; in fact, my having the power that I have depends on God's having the power he has. If I actually choose to do *A*, my power to choose not to do *A* is a power I do not exercise, but it is a power I genuinely possess, even though it depends on a power which God possesses.

God invests in me a certain power (to choose not to do *A*) while at the same time bringing it about that another power that I have (to choose to do *A*) is exercised. Note that if I actually choose to do *A* and do *A*, I am the author of the action as much as God is: “God’s knowing that I freely bring it about that *A* brings it about that I freely bring it about that *A*” entails that I freely bring it about that *A*.

Explication is not defense. There are philosophers who will find the account given above unacceptable even if they think it faithful to Aquinas. I cannot hope to pursue the issues further here, but hope to do so elsewhere.

III. How God Knows

In light of the discussion so far, we can make theses (A) and (B) somewhat more precise:

- (A') For any contingent thing, *x*, God’s practical knowledge about how to produce *x* and his unimpedible will to produce *x* are the cause of *x*’s existence.
- (B') For any contingent situation, *S*, God’s practical knowledge about how to bring about *S* and his unimpedible will to bring about *S* are the cause of *S*’s being the case.

God’s knowledge of the contingent world, then, on the view we have been canvassing, is like a craftsman’s knowledge of his products. Yet (A') and (B') are inadequate. They could be true and it could still be false that God knows anything about the contingent world. Consider the following analogy. A potter knows how to make a certain kind of pot. The requisite materials and tools are at hand. The potter in fact wills to make the pot. Straightway she makes the pot. Does she now know that she has made the pot before her? No, for while she was cleaning her hands, a rival potter, who cunningly fashioned a pot indistinguishable from hers, placed it next to hers, shuffled the two pots for a while, and then removed one. It happens that the pot he removed was his own, so that the pot before our potter really is the one she made. Under these circumstances, she does not know that the pot before her is hers, even though she made it, she believes that it is hers, and her belief is justified. Our potter’s claim to knowledge is defeated by circumstances, knowledge of which she does not possess.

This case is another illustration of the by-now-familiar fact that justified true belief is not the same as knowledge. Practical knowledge is no more immune from the sort of difficulty just sketched than speculative knowledge

is. Anthony Kenny has recently tried to make out a case for exempting practical knowledge:

... [I]f someone does know what he is doing—e.g. if he means to press button A and is pressing button A—then he knows that he is pressing button A without observation; he needs no further grounds, reason, evidence, etc. in order to make his meaning to press button A constitute knowledge that he is pressing button A. For speculative knowledge, in general, at least three things need to be the case for it to be true that X knows that *p*: first, that X believes that *p*, second, that *p* be true, and third, that X has grounds, i.e. good reason, for believing that *p*. In the case of practical knowledge only the first two are necessary.¹⁵

Imagine the following. Two perfectly similar buttons, A and B, are before Kenny's button-pusher, but the room is completely dark. He means to press button A, he stabs his finger out into the darkness, and as luck has it, he presses button A. By Kenny's lights he knows "without observation" that he is pressing button A. But that is absurd. I suspect that Kenny had in mind some background observational component when he (under-)described the case—namely, that the button-pusher could see button A. That component, however, when made explicit, is enough to allow us to construct all sorts of counterexamples. Perhaps there is some interpretation of "practical knowledge" which requires only belief and truth. But under that interpretation, practical knowledge is no more knowledge than a rubber duck is a duck.

In defense of (A') and (B'), some theist might wish to point out that they do not make claims about people in general but rather God in particular. It might be alleged that (A') and (B') are necessarily true because of the uniqueness of God's epistemic situation. God is omniscient, and hence no bizarre circumstances can defeat his knowledge, for he knows all details of all circumstances.

Such a maneuver has lost sight of the problem with which we began. We had recourse to the notion of practical knowledge in an effort to understand how God could be omniscient with respect to matters of contingent fact. Now my hypothetical theist offers to make intelligible the adequacy of God's practical knowledge by appealing to his omniscience. The circle involved here may not be vicious, but one can reasonably protest that the curvature is too tight for intellectual comfort.

The virtue of (A') and (B') is that they attempt to show how God can have knowledge of contingent fact without his knowledge being caused. The vice of

¹⁵ Kenny, *God of the Philosophers*, p. 35.

(A') and (B') is that they are powerless to explain why God's knowing how and willing that entail his knowing that. I suggest that the way to overcome that deficiency is to supplement (A') and (B') with

- (E) For any contingent thing, x , God's knowing that x exists is God's knowing that he wills that x exists,
and
(F) For any contingent situation, S , God's knowing that S is the case is God's knowing that he wills that S is the case.

(E) and (F) do not claim that God deduces his knowledge about Jones' BLT from his will. They claim, rather, that his knowledge about Jones' BLT just is his knowledge about his will with regard to Jones' BLT. What might seem to be two items of knowledge are one, according to (E) and/or (F). God's knowledge of contingent fact, then, is a kind of *self-knowledge*. He knows that Jones is eating a BLT because he wills that Jones is eating a BLT. As we have seen earlier, it cannot be that he infers his knowledge of his will from his will or from anything else. So his knowledge of contingent fact must be knowledge about his own willing activity and it must be noninferential.

Could there be such knowledge? I see no reason to think not. I believe it will be instructive to juxtapose our abstruse theological speculation with a contemporary discussion about the possibility and scope of contingent a priori knowledge.¹⁶

No one presently knows who wrote the *Ars Meliduna*. I stipulatively introduce the name "Fulbert of Melun" as a rigid designator—as a term which designates the same individual in every possible world in which that individual exists—whose reference is fixed by the descriptive phrase "the author of the *Ars Meliduna*." "Fulbert of Melun" is not an abbreviation for "the author of the *Ars Meliduna*": there are possible worlds in which Fulbert exists but is not the author of the *Ars Meliduna*. Because of this latter fact the sentence "Fulbert of Melun is the author of the *Ars Meliduna*" is contingently true if true at all. Now the phrase "the author of the *Ars Meliduna*" could fail to refer even if the *Ars Meliduna* was authored: it might be, for example, that it was composed by a band of disgruntled Parvipontanians. In order to simplify the discussion, I propose to suppress that complication. Since I have stipulated that Fulbert is the author, I know a priori that Fulbert is the author. Even if it is subsequently

¹⁶ In what follows I draw heavily on Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Keith S. Donnellan, "The Contingent A Priori and Rigid Designators," in Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 45–60.

discovered that the *Ars Meliduna* was written by Gerbert of Melun, my knowledge is secure, for all that the discovery shows is that Fulbert is Gerbert. Thus it seems that I have (1) a priori, (2) noninferential knowledge¹⁷ (3) of a contingent fact and that in an obvious sense, (4) the item of knowledge is not caused by the fact but (5) is generated by my stipulative activity. Finally, a case can be made that (6) my knowing that Fulbert is the author of the *Ars Meliduna* just is my knowing that I stipulated it so. Now if some of my knowledge of contingent matters can have these features, why cannot all of God's?

There are at least four impediments to this maneuver.

The first impediment. "The kind of knowledge you can generate by your stipulations is *de dicto*, not *de re*. What you know from the example described above is that the sentence 'Fulbert is the author of the *Ars Meliduna*' is true. You do not know, from that fact alone, that Fulbert is the author of the *Ars Meliduna*. Suppose that, as luck has it, somebody named 'Fulbert' actually did compose the *Ars Meliduna* and that this fact was well known by late-twelfth-century Parisian logicians. It would be facetious of you to claim that you know what they know. Their knowledge was causally connected in some right way(s) to Fulbert; by hypothesis, all causal avenues to knowledge about Fulbert's authorship are presently closed to you. Hence your vaunted knowledge about Fulbert is more like knowledge about 'Fulbert.' Your stipulative activities, no matter how fervently sincere, gain you no access to the real world of twelfth-century logicians."

If that is what God's knowledge of contingent matters amounts to, then his epistemic predicament is unenviable. He is like the author of a very detailed book—a maximally consistent book—who does not know whether his book is fact or fiction. In terms of Leibniz' arresting metaphor, if God surveys all possible worlds, and if the actual world is just one among these infinitely many possible worlds, then how, on the account given above, encapsulated in points (1)–(6), does God know which world is the actual world?

Points (1)–(6), if they characterize any of my knowledge, characterize only a quirky part of it. As we have seen, in the ordinary case my practical knowledge and my will are not sufficient to guarantee that I know what I have done or that my production went as I intended it. No matter how much practice I have had, I can flub, and circumstances can be recalcitrant in ways I had not anticipated. In contrast, God's practical knowledge is perfect and his will is unimpedible. His knowledge *de rebus* is like my knowledge of my stipulations with respect to points (1)–(6) above, but the difference between us is that his knowledge really is *de rebus*; to the extent to which I have knowledge satisfying

¹⁷ I take it that (1) and (2) say different things. Not all a priori knowledge need be noninferential, and not all noninferential knowledge need be a priori.

conditions (1)–(6), mine is not. My stipulations create fact *de dicto*; God's will creates facts *de re*. As for the question posed at the end of the previous paragraph, God knows which world is the actual world by knowing his will. That is, he wills only one world to be the actual world—not even he could will more than one¹⁸—and he knows which world is the actual world by knowing what he wills.¹⁹

The second impediment. “According to (E) and (F), God's knowledge about Jones' BLT is his knowledge of what he wills concerning Jones' BLT, but there is a gap between knowledge of will and knowledge of fact. Consider this inference:

x knows that he wills that P .

Thus:

x knows that P .

It is obvious that the first sentence can be true while the second is false. There is no entailment between the two, let alone identity. Claims like (E) and (F), then, are without defense. You have tried to paper over this gap by talking of God's perfect practical knowledge and his unimpedible will. These features need to be made explicit, and when they are, we have something like this (where P takes as values true contingent propositions):

- (1) God knows that he wills that P .
- (2) God knows that he knows how to bring it about that P .
- (3) God knows that his will with respect to P is unimpedible.

Thus:

- (4) God knows that P .

Once all this is made explicit, however, it looks as though God's knowledge of contingent fact really is inferential, contrary to your earlier stricture.”

¹⁸ The sentence “God can will only one possible world to be the actual world” has two interpretations. It can mean either that (a) not even God can will two or more possible worlds to be actual, since that is logically impossible, or that (b) given God's nature, there is only one world he could have chosen, e.g., the best of all possible worlds. One can subscribe to (a) without subscribing to (b).

¹⁹ I am not claiming here that God's willing it is what it is for the actual world to be actual. See Robert Merrihew Adams, “Theories of Actuality,” *Nous*, 8 (1974), pp. 211–231.

I see no reason to think that God must get to (4) by way of (1), (2), and (3). The issue is not whether (2) and (3) are true—they are entailments of any reasonable analysis of divine omniscience—but rather whether God needs them to have knowledge that *P*. Consider an earthly analogy. Suppose that Margaret sees that the dog is in the yard. Then Margaret's seeing that the dog is in the yard just is her knowing that the dog is in the yard. She need not infer her knowledge, consciously or subconsciously, from anything else. It may be that what leads *us* to believe that her seeing is her knowing is that we know that her visual apparatus is in sound working order and that in the present circumstances, her visual environment is normal. But Margaret need not know all that in order for her seeing to be her knowing. In similar fashion, that God knows how to bring it about that *P* and that his will is unimpedible may make it clear to us why God's knowledge of his will is his knowledge of fact—that is, why (1) and (4) jointly express an identity—but God himself does not have to rehearse (2) and (3) in order to know that *P*: all he needs to know is that he wills that *P*. Thus we are not forced to agree that (1)–(4) express a divine inference pattern.

The third impediment. "People can forget what they once knew, even what they once knew a priori. You may stipulate that Fulbert is the author of the *Ars Meliduna*, then forget that fact and come to believe later that you attributed the authorship to whoever wrote the *Tractatus Anagnini*. God may at such-and-such a time will that Jones eats a BLT, know at that time that Jones is eating a BLT, forget it fifteen minutes later, and come to believe that Jones was eating escargot. That kind of liability cannot befall an essentially omniscient being. But there is nothing in the account that you have given which addresses the issue of God's memory and the possibility of false beliefs. At best, your account is incomplete."

The fourth impediment. "The proposal is to base God's knowledge of contingent fact on his knowledge of himself. Why is self-knowledge any less problematic than factual knowledge? 'Know thyself' is no trivial piece of advice. We do not have Cartesian access to our own thoughts, and the variety of unconscious motivation, revision, and self-deception which people are capable of is wondrous to behold. The proposal, to be successful, must presuppose that God's will is perfectly transparent to himself. Why should we think that that is so?"

Both these objections allege, in effect, that I have traded in one sort of difficulty for another. I propose to respond to the objections by invoking a doctrine, to be found in Aquinas, which many have thought to be indefensible. As I move from frying pan to fire I shall be accompanied by the doctrine of divine simplicity, a doctrine which maintains that God, qua perfect being, has no physical parts or metaphysical constituents. Everything that God is just is God, according to the doctrine. I have defended the intelligibility of the doctrine

elsewhere and cannot hope to redeploy those defenses here.²⁰ What I shall do is show how the doctrine handles the third and fourth impediments.

If God is simple, then there are no temporal stages to his existence; a being with a temporal career is by that very fact complex. If God is simple and perfect, he is eternal in the Boethian sense of eternity: he enjoys “the complete possession all at once of illimitable life.”²¹ As a consequence, what God knows he knows all at once. There are no successive stages to his mental life, and if that is so, then many kinds of human mental phenomena (logically) cannot characterize him. He cannot *grow* angry, *fall* in love, *discover* new theorems in number theory, or *learn* the capital of the state of North Dakota. Nor can he forget, nor remember. The third impediment is a plausible objection only if one assumes that God’s experience is characterized by temporally successive stages. On the theory that God is simple and hence eternal, that assumption is a gratuitous piece of anthropomorphism. (It is now obvious why a defender of God’s eternity has no problem with God’s *foreknowledge* of human free choices.)

Consideration of the fourth impediment evokes the most distinctive feature of the doctrine of divine simplicity. According to the doctrine, there is no distinction in God between his substance and his attributes. “God is wise” and “God is powerful” are more perspicuously expressed as “Necessarily, God = the wisdom of God” and “Necessarily, God = the power of God.” Thus, “God,” “the wisdom of God,” and “the power of God” necessarily refer to the same thing if they refer at all. Pertinent to our present concern, Aquinas says that God’s being is his understanding (*ST*, Ia, q. 14, a. 5), and the context (see *ST*, Ia, q. 14, a. 2–4) makes it clear that he means that God’s being is his understanding of himself. Thus the doctrine of divine simplicity entails that God’s knowledge of himself is himself. The doctrine also entails that God’s knowing is his willing (*ST*, Ia, q. 19, a. 1). With these entailments under our belts we can ring the following changes on thesis (F). For any contingent situation, *S*, God’s knowing that *S* is the case = God’s knowing that he wills that *S* is the case = God’s willing that *S* is the case = God’s knowing himself = God. And if *S*’ is a situation distinct from *S*, then God’s knowing that *S* is the case = God’s knowing that *S*’ is the case.²²

According to the doctrine of divine simplicity, then, God is identical with his knowing and willing activity (and his knowing activity is identical with his

²⁰ William E. Mann, “Divine Simplicity,” *Religious Studies*, 18 (1982), pp. 451–471; William E. Mann, “Simplicity and Immutability in God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 23 (1983), pp. 267–276. Reprinted as Chapters 2 and 3 of this volume.

²¹ Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, Prose 6. See *ST*, Ia, q. 10, aa. 1–3; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78 (1981), pp. 429–458.

²² I have argued elsewhere that these identities do not preclude there being contingent situations, nor do they imply that God could not know or will other than what he does. See my “Simplicity and Immutability in God.”

willing activity), whereas I am not identical with my knowing or my willing. I can fail to have complete knowledge of myself just because my acts of knowing and willing are multifarious, distinct from themselves and from me. I see that the dog is in the yard, hear the rain falling outside, infer that the dog will get wet if I do not let him in, and decide to let him in. *Pace* Descartes, I may not be aware of all of this. The inference may be subconscious; in seeing that the dog is in the yard I may not realize that I am seeing that he is in the back half of the yard. However, if God is perfectly simple, then he is not subject to a plurality of acts of knowing and willing. His knowing that the dog is in the yard is his willing that the dog is in the yard, which is his willing that the Egyptians suffer a plague of locusts, which is his knowing that the Egyptians suffer a plague of locusts. One and the same divine activity is all these things and more. Moreover, this divine activity is not a part or an emanation or a property of God; it is God. His perfect awareness of himself is what it is to be God. The fourth impediment makes sense only if we think that God's mental life is composed of aspects, episodes, or parts which are distinct from each other and from God. No skeptical wedge about self-knowledge can be driven where there are no parts to be divided.²³

I believe, then, that the account given in theses (A)–(F), supplemented by the doctrine of divine simplicity, provides a coherent account of how God, a supremely perfect being, can have knowledge of contingent fact. The account meets the requirement insisted upon by traditional theists and entailed by God's being perfect; namely, that God's knowledge depend on nothing other than himself. The account is embedded in an ambitious web of philosophical and theological doctrines, some of which are not beyond controversy. How could it be otherwise? My only hope is that the tensile strength of the web is increased by its ability to absorb and dissipate the problem we have been examining.²⁴

Appendix

Summa theologiae, Ia, q. 14, a. 5:

... It is necessary that God know things other than himself. For it is manifest that he understands himself perfectly: otherwise his being

²³ The doctrine of divine simplicity has as a corollary the extended version of the doctrine of aseity mentioned in section I. No part or aspect of God depends on any other part or aspect because God has no parts and no plurality of aspects.

²⁴ An earlier version of this chapter received thoughtful comments from William Alston, Hilary Kornblith, and Norman Kretzmann, all of whom may still vigorously disagree with what I say here. Research for this chapter began with the aid of a research grant from the University of Vermont in the summer of 1981.

would not be perfect, since his being is his understanding. But if something is known perfectly, it is necessary that its power be known perfectly. But the power of some being cannot be known perfectly unless those things to which the power extends are known. Thus, since the divine power extends to other things—from the very fact that it is the first effective cause of all things, as is clear from what was said above (Ia, q. 2, a. 3)—it is necessary that God know things other than himself. And this becomes even more evident if it is added that the very being of the first efficient cause—namely God—is his understanding.

Summa theologiae, Ia, q. 14, a. 8:

... God's knowledge is the cause of things. For God's knowledge stands to all created things as the knowledge of a craftsman [*artifex*] stands to [his] artifacts. But the knowledge of the craftsman is the cause of artifacts just because the craftsman works through his intellect. Hence it must be that the form in the intellect is the working principle, as heat is the principle of heating. But one should remember that a natural form, insofar as it is a form remaining in that to which it gives being, does not denote a principle of action unless it has an inclination to an effect. Similarly, an intelligible form does not denote a principle of action according as it is merely in the one who understands, but only if there is adjoined to it an inclination to an effect which is through the will. For since an intelligible form covers opposites (since the same science covers opposites), it would not produce a determinate effect unless it were determined to one thing by desire, as it is said in *Metaphysics*, IX. But it is obvious that God causes things by his understanding, since his being is his understanding. Hence it is necessary that his knowledge is the cause of things, when conjoined with [his] will. ...

... Natural things are midway between God's knowledge and our knowledge. For we acquire knowledge from natural things, of which God, through his knowledge, is the cause. Hence, just as the knowable natural things are prior to our knowledge, and the measure of it, so God's knowledge is prior to the natural things, and the measure of them; just as a particular house is midway between the knowledge of the craftsman who builds it and the knowledge of him who acquires knowledge of it from the house already built.

Summa theologiae, Ia, q. 14, a. 16:

. . . Some knowledge is purely speculative, some is purely practical, and some is somewhat speculative and somewhat practical. As evidence of this one should realize that knowledge can be called speculative in three ways. First, on account of things known which are not manipulable [*operabilis*] by the knower, such as human knowledge of natural or divine things. Second, on account of the mode of knowing; for example, if a builder were to consider a house by defining, dividing, and considering its universal properties: this surely is to consider manipulable things in a speculative way, and not insofar as they are manipulable things. For a thing is manipulable by the application of form to matter, not by the resolution of the complex into its universal formal principles. Third, on account of the end, for “the practical intellect differs from the speculative intellect by its end,” as it is said in *De anima*, III. For the practical intellect is set in order to the end sought in its manipulation, but the end of the speculative intellect is the consideration of truth. Hence if some builder were to consider how some house could be made, not setting in order his manipulation to the end [of making it] but only to the end of knowing, that would be, in regard to the end, a speculative consideration, although of a manipulable thing. Therefore, knowledge which is speculative on account of the thing known itself is purely speculative. However, knowledge which is speculative either on account of the mode or on account of the end is somewhat speculative and somewhat practical. However, when it is set in order to the end sought in its manipulation it is purely practical.

Thus according to this one should say that God has purely speculative knowledge of himself, for he himself is not manipulable. However, of all other things he has knowledge both speculative and practical.

Divine Sovereignty and Aseity

SEARCHING for a way to avoid the rude anthropomorphism of his contemporaries, the Pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes said of God that “always he remains in the same state, in no way changing; nor is it fitting for him to go now here now there”; that “without effort, by the will of his mind he shakes everything”; that “he sees as a whole, he thinks as a whole, and he hears as a whole” (Barnes 1979, 1: 85, 93). Xenophanes’ pronouncements are the first recorded sallies into philosophical theology. Although he may have had the first word, he did not have the last: his descendants include Plato, Philo, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Spinoza, and a host of others.

Xenophanes emphasizes the differences between God and creatures. For many religious believers, however, it is the similarities that are most important. The God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is supposed to care for his creatures, know their innermost hopes and fears, respond to their prayers, strengthen them against adversity, share in their joy, console them in their sorrow and grief, judge their deficiencies, and forgive them their sins. These divine activities are *personal*; they could issue only from a being with beliefs and desires similar, in some respects at least, to ours. Any characterization of God that denied him these personal activities or negotiated them away in favor of some advantage to philosophical theology would be rightly regarded by believers as akin to replacing your loved ones with their cardboard cut-outs. Thus, it happens that many theists become wary of theories in philosophical theology that emphasize the differences between God and creatures. Perhaps no one really believes that God is Just Plain Folks. Even so, if the ascription of a particular attribute to God were to entail that God does not or cannot engage in the kinds of personal interactions mentioned above, then so much the worse for that ascription. To the extent to which philosophical theologians wish to emphasize that God is not an ordinary being, they are liable to bear the accusation that in making God Wholly Other, they have made God wholly disconnected.

Still, many of these same theists think they have excellent warrant for believing the following propositions about God, propositions that surely mark significant differences between God and creatures:

- (A) Everything that exists depends on God for its existence.
- (B) Every situation that is the case depends on God for its being the case.
- (C) God depends on nothing for his existence.
- (D) God depends on nothing for his being what he is.
- (E) God is perfectly free.

(A) and (B) are important components of a doctrine about God's metaphysical *sovereignty*. (C), (D), and (E) are central elements of a doctrine about God's metaphysical independence or *aseity* (from the Latin *a se*, from or by itself).

Widespread surface allegiance to (A)–(E) can mask deeper disagreements about how to interpret the theses and what they entail. Thus, consider the pair of theses (A)–(B). We can ask of (A) how we are to understand the scope of “everything.” Are there features of reality that are not literally *things* and that thus might be independent of God's sovereignty even while (A) is true? Does God himself fall within the scope of “everything,” and if so, what sense can we make of the notion that God depends on himself for his existence? In similar fashion, we can ask how widely to interpret the phrase “every situation” (alternatively, “every state of affairs”) in (B). Do such propositions as $2 + 2 = 4$, *If Jefferson is president, then Jefferson is president*, and *God is essentially omniscient* pick out situations that fall within the scope of (B)? If so, how should we understand (B)'s claim that even these situations depend on God for their being as they are? Or consider the proposition *Smith freely chooses to sin*: if true, it certainly picks out a situation. But how can Smith *freely* choose to sin if, as (B) maintains, that very situation depends on God for its being the case? And if it does depend on God, does that not make God an accomplice in Smith's sin?

Related questions beset the aseity assumptions, although perhaps not (C) so much as (D) and (E). How, for example, can God be essentially omniscient without depending on the possession of some sort of faculty for acquiring and retaining knowledge? At the core of theistic belief lies the tenet that God is a creator. How does this tenet comport with theses (D) and (E)? Many theists, from Plato on, have insisted that it is God's nature to be a creator. But if God must be a creator then there must be creatures, and so it would seem to follow, contrary to (D), that God depends on the existence of creatures for his being what he is. Moreover, if it is God's nature to create, it would seem to follow that

God cannot refrain from creating something and thus that God is not, as (E) maintains, perfectly free.

I shall discuss the issues raised in the previous two paragraphs. I do not, however, intend to remain above the fray. I shall argue for the tenability of a set of positions that many contemporary philosophical theologians regard as undercutting God's personal nature. As might be expected, I shall argue that that regard is unwarranted.

I. Divine Sovereignty

Parsimonious philosophers will suspect that (A) and (B) are one thesis too many. Some might contend that every situation is, after all, some kind of thing; thus, that thesis (B) collapses into a generously interpreted thesis (A). Others, on the contrary, might argue that a proper ontology would dispense with things as basic, construing them as complexes constructed out of situations, thereby relegating (A) to the status of corollary of (B). I do not propose to take a stand on the issue of thing- versus fact-ontologies. I shall treat (A) and (B) as relatively independent theses, commenting, however, on their interconnections as we proceed.

I.1 Creation

If asked to articulate the sense in which things depend on God for their existence, theists are apt to respond that God *created* things. Construed in this way, dependence as being created is a causal notion. Opinions begin to diverge as we press for details.

For all their impressive complexity, artistic creation and biological procreation simply involve, in different ways, the reworking of matter already on hand. If one thinks of God's creative role along these lines, one may arrive at a picture of creation like the one put forward by Timaeus (Plato 1997, 1234–1236): the universe is the ultimate artifact, the handiwork of an enormously powerful and benevolent craftsman. If we find reason to complain about the imperfections we find in the product, the blame is to be laid on the refractory nature of the chaotic, preexisting matter with which the craftsman had to work. (Not even the most skilled violin maker can achieve much success if the only raw materials available are Styrofoam and cotton string.)

Timaeus's account models creation on a causal process with which we are familiar enough. The familiarity, however, comes at a price that many theists are unwilling to pay. Matter, on Timaeus's account, exists and has its nature in

independence from the craftsman-creator. A fairly straightforward application of (A) tells against construing divine creation as a species of material rearrangement.

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* removes Timaeus's limitation. According to Augustine, for example, the universe was made out of "concreated" matter; that is, matter created simultaneously with the creation of the universe (1960, 367). A natural extension of Augustine's claim is to suppose that in creating the universe, God created the fundamental particles, stuff, or energy that makes up the universe and that God set the laws and parameters that describe thereafter the behavior of the physical processes that occur in the universe.

Creation *ex nihilo* is a significant departure from Timaeus's folksy account. It is one thing to give you titanium tubing and ask you to build a bicycle. It is quite another to ask you to build a bicycle out of nothing whatsoever. But for many believers, Augustine included, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, although true, is insufficient by itself to express the nature of God's creative activity and the dependency of creatures on God. For one thing, the doctrine gives us no reason to think that the creator still exists: sometimes artifacts outlast their artificers. For another, the doctrine by itself does nothing to validate the sentiment that God created *us*. Without such validation it is hard to see why it is appropriate for believers to respond to God as a spiritual parent. It is difficult to conjure up an attitude of filial piety toward a being whose sole contribution was to set into motion a chain of events that resulted, say, approximately 15 billion years later, in one's coming into existence. Although compatible with the doctrine of creation out of nothing, the deistic portrait of God as the cosmic artificer, whose craft is so supreme that he need not—and thus does not—subsequently attend to what he has created, is a poor resemblance to the believer's picture of God as personal.

One way of retouching the deistic portrait is to suppose that God does intervene in creation on occasion to perform miracles, not necessarily to adjust anything that has gone awry but rather to make manifest his providential concern. Many believers, however, who may doubt ever having witnessed a miracle, do not stake their claim for God's active, personal nature solely on such impressive divine sorties. For these believers miracles, almost by definition, occur in stark contrast to the way God sustains the everyday functioning of the world.

I.2 Conservation

Traditional theology has a remarkable strategy for characterizing God's sustaining function. The strategy involves two maneuvers. The first is to distinguish generation and corruption from creation and annihilation. Reserve the

term “creation” for the bringing of things into existence out of nothing. Then the term for the action opposite to creation is not “destruction” or “corruption” but “annihilation,” the returning of a thing to nonbeing. It is easy enough to destroy a bicycle—by hydraulic press, oxyacetylene torch, or teenage children. These are familiar types of corruption. To annihilate a bicycle, in contrast, would entail the *elimination*, not just the transformation, of a certain amount of the universe’s mass/energy. Just as no natural agent can build the bicycle out of nothing, so no natural agent can annihilate it.

The second maneuver is to insist that despite the apparent inviolability of the universe’s mass/energy, it has no inherent potentiality to continue to exist from one moment to the next. This claim has sometimes been put forward as a consequence of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*: anything having its origin in nonbeing will, left to its own devices, collapse back immediately into nonbeing. Alternatively, the claim has sometimes been defended by arguing that although the laws of nature along with the initial conditions of things at an instant may entail (in a suitably deterministic universe) what will occur at a future instant, since every instant of time is logically independent from every other instant, the laws and initial conditions are insufficient to guarantee that the future instant will exist. It is compatible with this claim that created things have the power to bring about changes both in themselves and among other created things. What created things cannot do, however, is continue to exist without God’s ever-present conserving activity.

Proponents of the strategy maintain that God’s conserving power is “equipollent” to God’s creative power. What they mean by this claim, at a minimum, is that it takes as much divine activity to sustain the created world from one instant to the next as it did to create it. Divine conservation is a kind of continuous creation (see Quinn 1983 for details).

A protest to divine conservation is that whereas the deistic portrait places God too far in the background, divine conservation makes God appear too near. In Greek mythology, Atlas was required to support forever the heavens on his shoulders. Divine conservation imposes a much more monumental burden on God: not just this firmament, but all of creation; not just to keep one body from falling through space but to keep everything from lapsing into nonbeing. Moreover, divine conservation appears to exacerbate the problem of evil. For it would seem that God does not merely allow atrocities to occur; he aids and abets the perpetrators by keeping them in existence throughout the commission of their atrocities.

One might cast about for some position that falls between the aloofness of deism and the coziness of divine conservation. But it is hard to see what such a position could be, such that it would not spawn even more serious problems of its own. Will the hypothetical position maintain that only *some* things must be continually sustained by God? If so, which ones? Why are the others privileged?

And would not their privileged status encroach on divine sovereignty? Or will the position claim that some creaturely functions occur independently of God's sustaining activity? At first blush, this version holds more promise. Some functions can outlast their hosts: if God were to snuff out the sun, its function of irradiating my garden would persist thereafter for approximately eight minutes. An adroit theologian might even be tempted to try to exempt sinful functions from God's support. To be sure, this version will invoke questions analogous to those listed earlier in the paragraph. But worse yet, it rests on a faulty assumption. A function may outlast some of its ancestral hosts, but no part of it can occur without being embedded in some host or other. And those hosts must be sustained in *their* existence. The last photons emitted from the sun immediately prior to its annihilation must themselves be sustained in existence if they are to irradiate my garden eight minutes hence: aftereffects do not earn an exemption just in virtue of being aftereffects. More generally, a function must be a function of some ensemble or sequence of things. If the function is spread over a period of time, the things on which the function depends must be kept in existence long enough to host the function. Sins are no exception; they must have perpetrators. Even if we suppose that a sinful act is freely committed, in some strong, indeterministic sense of freedom, that supposition does not gainsay the fact that the sinner must be kept in existence long enough to commit the sin.

It is not obvious, then, that intermediate positions are philosophically better off than divine conservation. But how bad is the case against divine conservation? Recall that two considerations were raised against it. One rested on a comparison to the plight of Atlas. Theists are entitled to regard the comparison as invidious. Atlas's chore is burdensome because it is imposed as a punishment and his strength is limited. But God is supposed by most theists to be a being of unlimited power and a being against whom no other being can prevail. Thus, it is hard to see how, for such a being, the conservation of creation could be exhausting drudgery. Conservation would be a problem if it took *all* of God's unlimited power to create and conserve something *ex nihilo* or if God inflicted the burden of creation on himself as some sort of act of supreme self-flagellation. Neither hypothesis seems remotely plausible.

The second worry about divine conservation was that it appears to confer on theism a particularly nasty version of the problem of evil. Theists typically concede that God *permits* evil to occur while denying that God *commits* evil. It is possible to see too much moral difference in the distinction between doing and allowing to happen. But in this case, the strategy of downplaying the difference is a dangerous one for the theist to pursue. It might have the unhappy result of assimilating divine doing to a type of mere passive allowing. Alternatively, it might promote divine allowing up to the level of active doing, which would validate the second worry. I suggest a different strategy, one

more narrowly tailored to divine conservation. The strategy is to argue that divine conservation does not *increase* the problem of evil for a theist who is willing to grant that God permits evil to occur.

Let us begin by considering this principle:

- (1) If x keeps y in existence while y does ϕ , then x is also responsible for doing ϕ .

Principle (1) is surely false. An oxygen tank may enable an arsonist to continue breathing while setting fire to a building, but the arsonist's crime cannot be imputed to the tank. If some modification of (1) is going to be plausible, it must incorporate appropriate restrictions into x 's knowledge, x 's power, even the sort of responsibility ascribable to x . Skipping a few intermediary iterations, we can examine this descendant of (1):

- (1') If x knows (a) that she is keeping y in existence while y does ϕ , (b) that y 's doing ϕ is morally impermissible, and (c) that she could have terminated y 's existence but chose not to, then x has done something that is morally impermissible.

(I take the consequent of (1') to leave it open whether x is to be charged with doing ϕ or with some other offense, such as being an accessory during the fact.)

As a general principle, (1') is implausible. Suppose that a medical technician knowingly keeps a patient alive while the patient commits perjury. From knowing just that much about the case one has no warrant to infer that the technician has acted in a morally impermissible way. There are, of course, ways in which the technician's case is not parallel to God's—indeed, that is one of the consequences of the doctrine of divine conservation—but they do not affect a general point that emerges here. An agent's knowingly and voluntarily keeping another agent in existence while the other agent does something forbidden is just one way an agent can allow evil to occur. Some cases of allowing evil to occur are culpable, but some, like the medical technician's case, need not be. Until shown otherwise, a theist is entitled to assume that divine conservation, insofar as it allows evil to occur, is nonculpable. Nothing I have said here diminishes the seriousness of the problem of evil. But I do not think that divine conservation adds to the problem.

I.3 Space and Time

It is natural to suppose that the scope of creation includes all beings. There are two ubiquitous features about creation, however, that deserve special

treatment; namely, space and time. Space and time seem not to be part of the cast of characters in the drama of creation but rather more like the theater in which the drama unfolds. Were they then always just *there*, so to speak, waiting to receive creatures? Newton thought so: Newtonian absolute space and time exist in splendid indifference to the objects that might occupy them. Leibniz dissented from Newton's absolutist conception, maintaining that space and time are essentially relational. Instead of a Newtonian container, impervious to whatever its contents might be, think of space and time as a network constituted in its entirety by existing things and the spatial and temporal relations—relations like *above*, *between*, *to the left of*, *earlier than*—among the existing things. On Newton's view, God could have created the world so that it consisted solely of an infinitely extended space and time populated by nothing. On Leibniz's view, not even omnipotent God could have done that, any more than God could have created a nephew without an aunt or uncle. Relations cannot exist without their relata. Leibniz contended, in addition, that relations are "unreal," in the sense that attributions of relations holding among things reduce to or can be analyzed into properties inherent only in the things themselves. Thus, for Leibniz the existence of a spatiotemporal manifold requires that there be a plurality of things bearing spatiotemporal relations among themselves, and that the relations thereby borne are nothing over and above the properties inherent to the things (see Alexander 1956).

Theists need not choose sides on the issue of absolute versus relational space and time. It might seem initially as though Leibniz's view accommodates divine sovereignty more easily than Newton's. For on Leibniz's view, the creation of space and time is simply a by-product of the activity of creating a world of sufficient complexity to involve its creatures in spatiotemporal relations. But Newtonians can rejoin that God's sovereignty also extends to the creation of absolute space and time. Perhaps the most startling feature of the rejoinder is that, when combined with the thesis that time is infinitely extended—more precisely, the part of that thesis that maintains that time has no beginning—the rejoinder entails that God created something that has no beginning! But a similar result will follow on Leibniz's view for any Leibnizian who maintains that some created things have existed forever.

The doctrine of divine conservation may help to dispel some of the air of paradox. According to divine conservation, the only difference between creation and conservation is that "creation" applies to the divine activity that results in a thing's first coming into being and "conservation" applies to the divine activity that keeps the thing in existence once it has come into being. If some things, like Newtonian space and time, have no beginning, then they have been perpetually conserved; they just have no first coming-to-be. (Note that it would seem to be a consequence of divine conservation that if some

things are beginningless and have been conserved at all times by God, then God must be infinitely old. I argue later that the inference is invalid.)

I.4 Contingent Truth

Let us say that a proposition is contingently true if it is true but might have been false. In the idiom of possible worlds, a contingently true proposition is one that is true in the actual world but false in some possible worlds. The Leibnizian imagery of God's choosing among the possible worlds extends God's creative sovereignty not only to creating and sustaining the actual world but also to determining which world would be actual by his selecting which set of contingent propositions would become the set of contingently true propositions. Theists should have no qualms about much of this imagery. It grounds a theistic explanation for the phenomenon of "fine-tuning"; that is, the observation that if the physical parameters had had virtually any other values than the ones they actually have, then a vastly different kind of universe, most likely to be inhospitable to life, would have existed. But other aspects of the Leibnizian imagery are more controversial. For centuries there has been a thriving cottage industry devoted to the problem of divine foreknowledge and future contingents: Does the set of contingent propositions selected by omniscient God include in it propositions specifying what his creatures would freely do in the future? Is it coherent to suppose both that God knowingly selected a world in which, say, the proposition *In 2020 Smith will cheat on her income taxes* is true and that Smith will cheat on her income taxes freely? If God selects a world in which that proposition is true, what role, if any, is left for Smith's selection? Compatibilists, philosophers who maintain that human freedom is compatible with determinism, will see no particular problem here: divine determination is just one kind of determination and not a kind of coercion. In contrast, libertarians, who insist that human freedom requires the absence of any kind of determination, will tend to stake out a class of propositions specifying free human decisions about which not even God knows the truth values in advance. It is not the purpose of this essay to provide adequate treatment of the problem. It is more in this essay's ambit to ask a different question, one that concerns the very status of contingent propositions: Even if God gets to determine which contingent propositions will be true, who got to determine that the propositions were contingent?

I.5 Necessary Truth

Many philosophers have alleged that the necessary propositions stand apart from the contingent propositions. Necessarily true propositions are true and

could not have been false. They are true in every possible world. Necessarily false propositions are false and could not have been true; they are false in every possible world. According to Leibniz, God surveyed all the infinitely many, infinitely diverse possible worlds in the process of selecting which world would be made actual by his creative choice. The imagery alone does not settle the issue of what God *saw* when he surveyed the possible worlds. Did God perceive that there were some propositions that just kept on coming up true in each possible world, some that always turned out false, and still others that were true in some worlds and false in others? This way of describing things suggests that God was a passive observer of the galaxy of possible worlds, able to single out one of them, to be sure, for creation, but not able to alter the modal status—contingent or necessary—of the propositions describing the worlds. Or was it rather that God’s “seeing” the possible worlds was God’s *determining* their structure, thereby conferring modal status on propositions?

The dichotomy of propositions, contingent versus necessary, is typically understood to be exclusive (no proposition is supposed to be both contingent and necessary) and exhaustive (no proposition is supposed to be neither). Philosophers as diverse as Descartes and Quine have, for reasons as diverse as the philosophers themselves, challenged the dichotomy. Quine regards the distinction as invidious, founded on bad metaphysics and having no more classificatory warrant than, say, the distinction between thoughts about the natural numbers and thoughts entertained on Tuesdays.

There is scholarly controversy about what Descartes’s views on the subject are (see Curley 1984). There is one defensible interpretation, however, that goes like this. God’s omnipotence extends even over what we call the necessary truths. God has it in his power, for example, to make the sum of 2 and 3 not equal to 5. On this interpretation, every proposition is, from the point of view of God’s power, *metaphysically contingent*. Yet God also made us so that, given our cognitive constitution, it is *epistemically necessary* for us that $2 + 3 = 5$. That is, we are incapable of conceiving what it would be like for the sum of 2 and 3 not to equal 5. Inasmuch as every proposition is metaphysically contingent, God’s power over what propositions would be true is not constrained in any way. The firm belief we creatures have that some truths could not have been otherwise than what they are is a consequence not of their metaphysical necessity—for there is no such thing—but rather of their epistemic necessity for us.

If Descartes’s motivation is to make God master of the modal economy, then I think we must conclude that he has failed. For on the account just sketched, there remain metaphysical necessities over which God has no control. On this Cartesian account it is impossible even for omnipotent God to hold our present cognitive capacities fixed while enabling us to comprehend

what it would be like for $2 + 3 \neq 5$. (An act of divine revelation could have the effect of warranting a person in believing that the sum of 2 and 3 could have been 7. But unless the revelation somehow enhances the believer's intellect, the believer is not equipped to know what it would be like for the proposition to be true.) The Cartesian account has another consequence that may be unsettling for many theists. If every proposition is metaphysically contingent, then propositions about God's nature are not exempt. To take examples, the propositions that God is omniscient, omnipotent (which, keep in mind, plays a central role in the present interpretation of Descartes's views), perfectly good, even that God exists, are at best contingently true. But, to anticipate discussion coming later in this essay, it has generally been taken to be a consequence of God's aseity that God's existence and nature are metaphysically necessary.

The Cartesian strategy of demoting all necessary truths to contingent truths thus comes with a cost. Perhaps it is a cost a theist would be willing to pay for securing an especially strong version of divine sovereignty. Perhaps not. There is another way of approaching the same issues that has its roots in the thought of Augustine. The Cartesian strategy appears to be founded on the unlimited power of God's will. What I call the Augustinian strategy takes as its point of departure the integrity of God's intellect. Plato had said that the Forms, abstract entities denoted by expressions like Justice, Beauty, and The Good (or Goodness Itself), are eternal, unchanging, perfect exemplars, which concrete things only deficiently resemble, and the objects on which objective knowledge depends. Augustine claimed to be merely following Plato's lead in locating the Forms in the mind of God (1982, 79–81). Augustine's move is an affirmation of God's sovereignty: if the Forms are God's thoughts or ideas, then their very existence depends on God's thinking them.

We can, I believe, embellish the Augustinian strategy by connecting the notion of Forms as divine thoughts to the notion of necessary truth. If they are to serve the function of grounding necessary truth and thereby ensure the possibility of stable, objective knowledge as opposed to inconstant, wavering belief, the Forms, construed as divine ideas, must at a minimum be eternal objects of God's thinking. Particular triangles scrawled in the sand or on the blackboard come and go and may not (cannot?) have the sum of their interior angles quite equal to 180 degrees. But The Triangle Itself never ceases to exist or falls short of having its interior angles sum to 180 degrees. (Or at least this is true of The Euclidean Triangle Itself!) But it is not clear that God's eternally thinking of The Triangle is sufficient to explain why it is a necessary truth that its interior angles sum to 180 degrees. Even if we suppose that necessary truths are eternally true, it need not follow that eternal truths are necessarily true. We should not rule out of court the view that God knew "from eternity" that Adam would sin at such and such a time yet that Adam's sinning was contingent.

The embellished Augustinian strategy proceeds by pointing out that omniscient God's "thinking" about The Triangle is actually God's having *comprehensive knowledge* of The Triangle. Such comprehensive knowledge entails knowing The Triangle's *essence*. Generalizing, we may say that each Form has an essence, a set of properties that the Form must have if it is to be the Form that it is. Many of the necessary truths, then, are propositions specifying the essential properties of the Forms. In knowing these propositions to be necessarily true, God knows, among other things, that he cannot have comprehensive knowledge of The Triangle without knowing that its interior angles necessarily sum to 180 degrees. To say God cannot comprehend The Triangle in any other way is not to point out a constraint on God's powers but rather to say something about the rational structure of God's mind.

Let us see if we can make this notion more precise. The Augustinian strategy insists on three points. First, there are necessary truths. Second, the necessity of these truths entails that it is impossible even for God to alter them. Yet—this is the third point—these necessary truths depend on God's cognitive activity for their status. The apparent tension between the latter two claims can be alleviated by appealing to the notion of supreme rationality to explain the necessary truths rather than vice versa. The necessary truths are the deliverances of a supremely rational mind. Had this mind failed to exist, there would have been no necessary truths. Had this mind failed to have been supremely rational, there would be no explanation of necessity. Of course, the Augustinian strategy maintains that the proposition that supremely rational God exists is itself a necessary truth. What follows from this, on the Augustinian strategy, is that God is the explanation of his own existence. That consequence is an important part of a doctrine of God's aseity, to be discussed below.

Here are two final observations about the Augustinian strategy. First, although we launched it from a Platonic platform, the strategy can be redeployed without commitment to the existence of the Forms. We can, for example, replace reference to The Triangle with reference to genuine triangles. The Augustinian strategy delivers a theory about necessary truth dependent on supremely rational divine cognitive activity. Whether it is accurate to describe that activity as trafficking in Forms, ideas, or whatever is something about which we can remain agnostic. It may just be that these descriptions are human ways of gesturing to an activity that is otherwise literally incomprehensible to us. There is an additional benefit of freeing the strategy from the Forms. I said earlier that on the "Formal" version of the Augustinian strategy, *many* of the necessary truths are propositions specifying the essential properties of the Forms. It is hard to see how to extend the claim to *all* necessary truths. What about, for example, "God is omniscient"? Many theists claim

that it is a necessary truth. But on the Augustinian view itself, God is emphatically not a Form. If the Formal version does not provide a uniform account of necessary truth, if we must make exceptions to it, perhaps we should favor a version that does provide a uniform account.

Second, on the standard, modal-logical interpretation of necessity, necessary propositions are necessarily necessary and contingent propositions are necessarily contingent. That is, on the standard interpretation, every proposition has its modal status fixed necessarily. If one supposes that necessity is to be explained by supremely rational divine activity, this modal-logical result is not unwelcome.

I.6 Summing Up

We have examined conceptions of divine sovereignty that have become progressively more ambitious. We began with the thesis of creation *ex nihilo*, according to which matter has no independent, primordial existence. We then observed that the doctrine of divine conservation extends creatures' dependence on God over moment-to-moment continued existence. We noted briefly that on either an absolutist or relational theory of space and time, these features too can be regarded as dependent on God. We raised the issue of whether God is responsible for the truth values of all contingent propositions. Finally, we examined two versions of the thesis that God is responsible for the modal status of all propositions. The Cartesian strategy makes all propositions contingent and subject to God's omnipotence. The Augustinian strategy preserves the distinction between contingent and necessary propositions while subsuming them all under God's rational comprehension.

My guess is that thoughtful theists will converge on the doctrines of creation and conservation and be willing to extend them to space and time. They may diverge on the issue of whether God is responsible for the truth-values of *all* propositions, primarily because different and controverted conceptions of human freedom are at stake. Finally, many of them will regard the issue of God's relation to the modal economy with some indifference, not feeling strongly partisan about the Cartesian or Augustinian strategies. On all of these topics I suspect that theists will find no threat for God's status as personal.

II. Aseity

The impulse to ascribe some sort of aseity to the object of one's worship has an understandable basis. Ordinary things and people can be distressingly fragile,

vulnerable, inconstant, ephemeral. There are degrees: Everest is more stable and secure than a mayfly. We know, nonetheless, that even Everest's life span is finite. We know that because we know that our planet's life span is finite. We know our planet's life span is finite because we know our sun's life span is finite. And so it goes.

Theists have insisted that a God worthy of worship be exempt from these sorts of vicissitudes. God is "from everlasting to everlasting." Nothing can prevail against him. He is supposed to be equally stable and steadfast in his resolve, not subject to growth, decay, alteration, whim, or change of plan. As Xenophanes put it, "Always he remains in the same state, in no way changing." The philosophical exploration of these sentiments yields a doctrine whose main contours are captured by theses (C)–(E).

II.1 Historical Dependency and Contemporaneous Vulnerability

Let us consider (C) and (D) in tandem. Dependency relations can be historical or contemporaneous. To take a historical example first: for species that reproduce by sexual means, an offspring organism owes its being the organism it is to its parents. "Being the organism it is" can be understood in two ways. In the first, an organism's being the *kind* of organism it is depends on the kind of organism its parents were. In the second, if identity of genotype is a necessary condition for an organism's being *this* individual rather than some other individual of the same species, then *this* individual organism owes its existence to the historical event of *that* particular sperm cell meeting *that* particular egg.

Theists will insist that there are no historical dependency relations to God's existence. Greek myth provides Zeus with an ancestry, but nothing is supposed to correspond to that with God. Nor do there appear to be any other kinds of historical relations on which God depends. But if God's existence has no pedigree, it is hard to see how what God is, or God's nature, could depend historically on anything either.

Turn now to contemporaneous dependency relations. Creatures with lungs depend presently on an atmosphere rich in oxygen for their continued existence. Because the presence of an atmosphere depends on the mass of the planet, creatures with lungs also presently depend on the Earth's continuing to have sufficient mass. Here again theists will claim that there are no conditions or states on which God depends for his continuing to exist. There is no Kryptonite that can make God vulnerable, no cosmic spinach God must consume in order to save the universe's Olive Oyls from the clutches of the universe's Blutos.

II.2 Structural and Contentful Dependency

A persistent critic might concede that there are no *vulnerability* conditions on which God is dependent but insist that God is subject nevertheless to *structural* and *contentful* dependency relations. Here is one way to understand the critic's point. Many philosophers agree, partly or fully, with Locke about the identity of persons. Hardly anyone will demur from Locke's characterization of a person as "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places" (1700/1975, 335). Locke's conception of a person attributes a partial structure to a person's mind by ascribing to it some essential capacities, such as the capacities for reason, self-awareness, and memory. Somewhat more controversial is Locke's criterion for a person's identity through time. Locke thought that a person's identity through time was a function of the person's experiential memory. Roughly, x and y are the same person at different times if and only if x remembers experiencing something that y experienced. What is experienced and hence what is remembered can vary enormously among persons without the variation compromising their status as persons. Thus, Locke's theory of personal identity provides ample room for the ascription of diverse mental content to persons. Of course, one does not need to accept Locke's theory to believe we have all sorts of diverse mental content. Persons, then, have parts or components that are structurally essential to their being persons, but they also have mental states that are accidental to their being persons.

The persistent critic's point is this. Theists insist that God is personal. In fact, for theists, God would appear to pass Locke's criteria for personhood with flying colors. If so, then God must have those capacities that are essential to persons, including the capacities for reasoning, self-awareness, remembering, and—some items not mentioned by Locke but items that theists will not want to deny—capacities for perceptual awareness and willing. Now, there is a powerful psychological theory to the effect that these capacities, or the modules that serve them, are informationally encapsulated; that is, they operate on specific domains of input and in relative isolation from each other (see Fodor 1983). It follows, says the persistent critic, that God's mind is internally structured, consisting of a suite of diverse mental faculties on which God depends essentially in order to be the being he is.

Finally, here is the persistent critic's case for God's having accidental mental states that are dependent on the way the world is. Pick any contingent fact about the created world; say, that it rained last night. An omniscient God must know this fact. Part of the content of God's mind, then, is dependent on the fact that it rained last night. The example can be generalized to every contingent fact.

II.3 Simplicity and Modularity

To examine the case of structural dependency first: if God's mind were structured by informationally encapsulated modules, then some parts of God's mental activity would be opaque to other parts. Perhaps the highest level of divine consciousness, where all the information streams converge, could take in all the modular activity. The modules themselves, however, would remain relatively blinkered. Such opacity may be part of the human condition, but many theists would resist applying to God's mental activity the imagery of corporate structure, with underlings functioning on a need-to-know basis.

Aquinas and others articulated a view that is consistent with the modularity thesis about human minds yet denies the application of the thesis to God's mind. For present purposes we can single out one element of the view. It is the claim that there is no diversity of modules or "faculties" that structures the divine mind. Consider the augmented list constructed from Locke's characterization of a person: reason, self-awareness, memory, perceptual awareness, and will. Focus initially on perceptual awareness, self-awareness, and will. In humans, perceptual awareness of the created world requires the possession of the right kinds of healthy, functioning, physical organs operating in the right sorts of physical environment. If God is a spiritual being, then however God acquires awareness of creation, it cannot be in virtue of possessing the right kinds of physical receptors functioning in an environment to which they are adapted. Suppose, instead, that God is aware of all of creation simply in virtue of having created it. God knew every detail of the world he would select and knows that he has selected it. The kind of awareness that God would thus have is immediate; in having complete cognitive access to himself, God is aware of the world. Perceptual awareness and self-awareness are two separate faculties in humans, but in God, what we call perceptual awareness is subsumed under divine self-understanding.

The next step is to connect self-understanding to the will. Nothing could be clearer than that in the case of humans, what we understand about ourselves often conflicts with what we want. An integrated personality would be one in which desires and self-knowledge are in harmony. Theists presume that such integration is enjoyed by God. The more radical step is not merely to assume that whatever God understands, God wills, and vice versa, but to claim that in God, self-understanding and will are not two distinguishable modules or faculties. God's "will" is perfectly rational and God's "understanding" is perfectly voluntary; better yet, *God* is perfectly rational and voluntary, a being whose unimaginably rich mental life is lived in complete, unfragmented transparency. Theists will no doubt continue to describe God's activity in terms of

belief-desire psychology, but that vocabulary is based on and better suited for describing compartmentalized human minds.

I cannot explore the issues more fully here, but what we have just encountered is one aspect of a doctrine about God's *simplicity*. The core of the doctrine is the principle that inasmuch as complexity is a source of fragility and dependence, a perfect being must be perfectly noncomplex (see Aquinas 1948, 1: 14–20). The aspect of divine simplicity deployed above denies modularity to God's mind. We will never know exactly what Xenophanes meant, but this denial may be what he was struggling to express when he said of God that "he sees as a whole, he thinks as a whole, and he hears as a whole."

We deferred discussion of reason and memory. To put it in a way calculated to shock, the campaign against divine modularity denies that God has reason. Here is why. Distinguish reason from understanding, reserving the latter term for the capacity to simply grasp or "see" some truth without inferring it from other truths. You and I understand that $2 + 2 = 4$; perhaps you but certainly not I understand that $789 + 987 = 1776$. In contrast, reason is a discursive practice, passing from premises to conclusion by the canons of either deductive logic, inductive logic, or decision theory.

Because God's intuitive understanding of all things is maximal, God has no need of reason. (Of course, God's understanding of the principles of discursive reasoning is also perfect. One need not be a soccer player to know the rules of the game.)

That leaves memory. I propose to defer discussion of it a bit longer.

II.4 Simplicity and Accidental Properties

The persistent critic's second claim is that the contents of God's mind include every contingent fact, knowledge of which God must have in order to qualify as omniscient. *Knowing that it rained last night*, for example, is one of tremendously many accidental properties that God has. The persistent critic's claim is that God's mind is both complex in virtue of hosting an (infinite?) number of accidental properties and dependent on the world as source of those properties.

We have already caught a glimpse of how one might respond to the dependency claim if one espouses a doctrine of divine simplicity. Knowledge of the world is part of God's self-awareness, and God's self-awareness and will are not two separate things. The critic's dependency claim appears to rest on the assumption that as things are for us, so they are for God. We are *consumers* of knowledge about the world, standing as recipients on many causal chains, beginning with situations in the world and ending with states of our minds. God, in contrast, is a *producer* of knowledge. The ordinary causal flow from thing

known to knower is reversed in God's case. If God's understanding the fact that it rained last night is God's will that it rained last night, then the divine noetic/volitional activity is the cause of the fact; the fact is not the cause of the activity (see Mann 1985).

Even if we accept all this, the critic may persist, will it not be true that to be omniscient, God's mind must be characterized by a host of accidental properties? Only if we accept the inference from "God knows the contingent fact that *p*" to "God exemplifies the accidental property of *knowing that p*." The inference is easy enough to resist. At the same time, it is easy to see the attractiveness of the related inference from "Jones knows that *p*" to "Jones exemplifies the accidental property of *knowing that p*." As the etymology suggests, an accidental property is a property that a thing acquires *per accidens*, a modification of the thing brought about by the workings of some other thing. Jones knows that it rained last night because he saw it raining, or saw that the streets were wet this morning, or read about it in the newspaper. In each case Jones's knowledge is caused, directly or indirectly, by the fact. Given this account of accidental propertyhood in terms of causal dependency, we have seen reason to think that God has no accidental properties. To put it in other terms, the doctrine of God's simplicity, together with a causal conception of an accidental property, entails that God has no such properties.

II.5 Simplicity and Eternality

Now to take up the case of memory. Never lacking in persistence, our critic bids us consider the following dilemma. "Even the supercharged sort of self-awareness that God is supposed to enjoy—no self-deception, complete transparency of self to self—is, strictly speaking, a second-order monitoring capacity of God's *present* mental states. That is, by means of self-awareness God can perceive only what is occurring in his mind now. Surely a being could have self-awareness and yet lack memory. Memory is not so much a monitoring capacity as a storage-and-retrieval capacity. Thus, if God has memory in addition to self-awareness, then the thesis that God's mind is nonmodular is false. But if God lacks memory, then the only knowledge God can have of the past is by way of retrodictive inference from present states of the world, or of God's mind, to past states. You may suppose, if you like, that God has time-indexed representations of all past events presently open to his omniscient gaze, much as a person might have an album of dated photographs open on a coffee table. To suppose this, however, is to concede that a memoryless God's knowledge of the past is inferential, *from* the representations *to* the past events as the best explanation for the existence and content of the representations. Retrodiction, however, is a kind of discursive reasoning that is incompatible with God's alleged

simplicity. Thus, if God lacks memory, then either God is not omniscient or God is not simple.”

Let us approach this issue by first recalling the motivation behind the ascription of simplicity to God. God must be noncomplex, having no components or parts, because if God had parts then God would be dependent on those parts. Begin by taking the notion of part in its most familiar sense. Theists believe that God has no physical or material parts. Because the physical is bound so tightly with space, theists are disinclined to attribute spatial dimensions to God. At the same time, it is important to theists to be able to say that God is *at* or present to various regions of space, indeed, all of them. As Xenophanes put it, it is “not fitting” for God “to go now here now there”; not fitting, because God already *is* here *and* there. Theists have insisted, moreover, that however this notion of divine spatial presence is to be understood—here we might expect the thesis of divine conservation to elucidate the notion—it does not entail that only a part of God is in one place and another part in another. It is, rather, that God is present as a whole, in his entirety, at every spatial region (see Augustine 1960, 85).

Can a parallel case be made for God’s relation to time? To be parallel, the case would have to exhibit two features. Just as God is everywhere, so God is *everywhen*; that is, there is no instant of time at which God is absent. If time is infinitely extended, having no beginning or end, then God has a beginningless and endless life. But suppose that time is not infinitely extended. Suppose, as some theories in physical cosmology maintain, that there was a first moment of time, or that there will be a last moment. Are we then to conclude that God’s life is finitely circumscribed?

A theist who holds a reasonably strong version of God’s sovereignty will remind us that time, as a feature of creation, depends for its existence on God, not vice versa. For such a theist it should not be the case that questions about the character of God’s life depend for their answers on the nature of time, any more than they depend for their answers on the nature of space. That God is *everywhen* is the first of the two features necessary to construct an account of time parallel to the theist’s account of space. The second is that God in his entirety is present at every instant of time. It is not the case that one temporal part or stage of God is present at one moment of time and another at another. Ordinary creatures live their lives successively, one moment at a time, passing from past to present to future. God, in contrast, lives his life comprehensively, taking in all of a creation that may be infinitely extended in time in one simultaneous act of comprehension. Taken together, the two features, *everywhenness* plus comprehensiveness, yield a doctrine about God’s *eternality*, or mode of existence in eternity, defined by Boethius as “the complete possession all at once of illimitable life” (1973, 422; see Stump and Kretzmann 1981, 431).

The doctrine of God's eternity comports nicely with the doctrine of God's simplicity. Simplicity rules out temporal parts or stages. Eternality emphasizes that " x has no temporal parts or stages" does not entail " x exists for only an instant." A theist, armed with the doctrine of God's eternity, now can reply to the persistent critic's dilemma concerning God's memory. Memory is a faculty only of time-bound creatures. The theist can cheerfully agree that God has no memory because nothing that has happened is past to God. All is present—literally *present*—before God, with no confusion, even so, about what events in creation are temporally earlier than, later than, or simultaneous with other events. And the doctrine of God's eternity comports well with scripture: God is not merely everlasting but from everlasting to everlasting.

II.6 Divine Freedom

The final thesis of our quintet, (E), claims that God is perfectly free. At a minimum, we would expect a perfectly free being to be utterly unconstrained. Nothing should be able to defeat or thwart such a being's activities or plans. When we reflect on this point, we may come to think that the threat to God's freedom comes not from without but from within. No creature or ensemble of creatures can prevail over God, as Zeus prevailed over Kronos. But might there not be features about God's own nature that place constraints on what God can do? I shall not attempt to canvass all the different forms this question might take. I propose instead to look at one salient case, hoping that its discussion provides insights about how to respond to related cases.

What latitude of choice did God have in creating? We can divide this question into two: Could God have refrained from creating at all? and Given that God decided to create something, must God create the best world that he can? There are four possible combinations of answers to these questions. (1) Yes, God could have refrained altogether from creating, but yes, if God has decided to create, then God must create the best possible world he can. (2) Yes, God could have refrained from creating, and no, if God has decided to create something, he need not create the best world he can. (3) No, God could not have refrained from creating, and yes, God must create the best possible world he can. (4) No, God could not have refrained from creating, but no, God need not create the best world that he can. Although I do not document it here, I believe that each position has had its advocates and that the advocates have not taken their respective positions to pose any problem for God's freedom. For present purposes, let us focus on position (3), as it appears to be the one whose acceptance would delimit God's freedom more than the others.

How can position (3) be reconciled with maximal divine freedom? Consider the first half of (3). There are clearly cases in which we say that a particular person could not have refrained from performing some action. Jill had to participate in the bank robbery because her family was being held hostage. Gil had to shoplift because he is a kleptomaniac. Jill's case is an example of external compulsion: some agency other than Jill compels her to do what she would not otherwise do.

The source of Gil's compulsive behavior is within Gil. What makes Gil's behavior a case of kleptomania is that Gil has a desire to steal that, at the moment of theft, overrides Gil's other desires, notably Gil's second-order desire not to have a desire to steal. In the conflict between first-order desire and second-order desire, the first-order desire triumphs. It is useful to contrast Gil's situation with Will's, who is, let us say, a *kleptophilic*. Will has a desire to steal, but unlike Gil, Will has a second-order desire to maintain and nourish his first-order desire to steal. Gil would like to disown his first-order desire, while Will cheerfully endorses his. Setting aside further fictional elaboration about how Will came to acquire the desires he has, we can say that Will's thievery is more lamentable yet freer than Gil's. In particular, those theists who want to blame much of the world's evil on human misuse of freedom will deny the claim that because Will's thievery is wrong, it must be unfree.

If God is omnipotent, he cannot be subject to external compulsion. Thus, God's choosing to create cannot be like Jill's "choosing" to participate in a bank robbery. But perhaps there is something in the structure of God's desires that makes him a compulsive creator? If God's creative activity were to be labeled compulsive, there would have to be a conflict between a first-order desire to create and a second-order desire not to have that first-order desire, and the first-order desire would have to drive God's behavior. God would have to be in relevant respects like Gil, not Will.

Theists are entirely within their rights to suppose that no such conflict characterizes the divine mind, for a conflict of desires betokens an imperfectly integrated personality. But in arguing for the lack of compulsion in God, have theists left room for one of (3)'s distinctive claims, that God could not have refrained from creating? A defender of (3) must suppose that the uncoerced desire to create flows from God's self-transparent, self-ordered, and self-endorsed nature. That nature includes—or is—perfect goodness. A defender of (3) is likely to follow the steps first taken by Plato, maintaining that a good being must want to share its goodness with others. But others have to exist in order to share in this goodness. Thus, a perfectly good being must have the desire to create (see Plato 1997, 1236). The desire is an entailment of God's nature; the desire along with the nature are freely embraced by their possessor.

The other part of position (3) maintains that if God creates, then God must create the best world he can. This part of (3) presupposes that there is a best world God can create. One might suppose, given God's omnipotence, that the best world God can create is in fact the best of all possible worlds. It would take us too far afield to probe these suppositions. The question more directly before position (3) is this: Can God be free if God must choose the best?

In response, an advocate of (3) can develop the following line. Suppose that Antonio has the skill and resources to make violins of unsurpassable sonority and beauty. Suppose that the investment of time, energy, and resources is the same whether Antonio makes a superb or a mediocre violin. Suppose further that Antonio is under no special obligation to anyone concerning what sort of violin he will make and that Antonio bears no malice toward the potential owner of the violin he will make. Suppose even further that there is no greater good that could have been realized had Antonio refrained from violin making. Suppose finally that Antonio knows all this. In the teeth of all these suppositions, Antonio nevertheless produces a mediocre violin. How do we explain Antonio's performance?

Antonio displays weakness of will, or knowing the good but failing to do it. Plato found such cases so unintelligible that he declared them impossible: any agent who fails to do the good must be lacking a relevant item of knowledge. We may not be persuaded by Plato's thesis as a piece of human psychology. It seems more attractive, however, as a thesis of divine psychology. For how could omnipotent God lack the willpower to do what omniscient, perfectly good God sees is the best thing to do? So if God creates, he not only will but must create the best, as the second half of (3) maintains. Any being who could create a suboptimal world would not be essentially omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God. To finish the story, a defender of (3) can remind us that the necessity involved here has its source entirely in God's own uncompelled, unconflicted nature.

Recall that our strategy was to show that an advocate of (3) can plausibly advance an argument for God's maximal freedom, not because of some belief that (3) is the most acceptable position but because (3) is the position that raises most pointedly questions about God's freedom. I am inclined to doubt, for example, that there is a best possible world or a best creatable world. Perhaps for any world God can create, there is a better world God can create, *ad infinitum*. If this is so, it need not be a source of limitation or frustration for God. If possible worlds just are the infinite possibilities that God entertains, then to complain that God cannot find a best among them would be finding fault with unlimited vision or imagination.

II.7 Summing Up

Most theists will agree that God depends historically and contemporaneously on nothing. There are more ambitious versions of God's aseity. One of them maintains that God's mind is not modular: what we call God's understanding and God's will, for example, are not two things in God but the same thing described vagariously by finite minds that *are* modular. Another holds that given an independently attractive conception of an accidental property, God does not have and thus does not depend on any accidental properties. Yet another claims that God's life does not depend on the occupancy of space or the passage of time. Finally, we have looked at an argument to the effect that God can be maximally free even if he must create and must create the best.

Reasonable theists can wrangle philosophically about some of these dimensions of aseity. Some of those quarrels will, I suspect, begin with the question, Do we really need to think that God is independent in *that* respect? Is it really important, for example, to think that God has no accidental properties? Here I will end with an observation and a wager. Importance is relative to a purpose. It may be important to one's philosophy, but it is not likely to be important to one's salvation that one have the right view about accidental properties. And I wager that whatever flaws there may be with some of these dimensions of aseity, they cannot be faulted for depicting God as less than fully personal.

Note

Earlier versions of this chapter benefited from comments from Hugh McCann and William J. Wainwright.

Works Cited

- Alexander, H. G., ed. 1956. *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1948. *Summa Theologica*. 5 vols. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics.
- Augustine. 1960. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Garden City, NY: Image Books.
- . 1982. *Eighty-Three Different Questions*. Vol. 70 of *The Fathers of the Church*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- Barnes, Jonathan. 1979. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Boethius. 1973. *Tractates, De Consolatione Philosophiae*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Curley, Edwin M. 1984. "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths." *Philosophical Review* 93: 569–597.
- Fodor, Jerry A. 1983. *The Modularity of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Locke, John. [1700] 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mann, William E. 1985. "Epistemology Supernaturalized." *Faith and Philosophy* 2: 436–456. Reprinted as Chapter 5 of this volume.
- Plato. 1997. *Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1983. "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action." In *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso, 55–79. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Stump, Eleonore, and Norman Kretzmann. 1981. "Eternity." *Journal of Philosophy* 78: 429–458.

Omnipresence, Hiddenness, and Mysticism

Many theists of quite different religious traditions have stressed the importance of God's ubiquity or omnipresence.¹ It is not hard to see why. Epicurean gods, for example, are utterly detached from us; engagement with the hurly-burly of the earthly scene would disrupt their *ataraxia* or supreme tranquility. Their status might evoke feelings of envy in us but not attitudes appropriate to worship. Deists might give thanks to their god for setting the world in motion, but, as Hume pointed out, the exertion might have brought about that deity's subsequent disinterest or demise. Many theists believe that a deity worthy of worship is one who is present to and cares about all of creation at all times.

I am concerned here not to argue that belief in God's omnipresence is true. My concern is rather to see what sense can be made of the belief, especially in light of the fact that God's omnipresence is not obvious to many of those same theists who regard it as a nonnegotiable condition of being worthy of worship. Moreover, although belief in divine omnipresence might satisfy the desire for an *immanent* God, it seems hard to square with a belief in a *transcendent* God, a God who is somehow apart from and independent of the natural world. I begin by examining some attempts to delineate the metaphysics of omnipresence. I then criticize some attempts to explain why the presence of an omnipresent being can be hard to detect. I conclude by looking at one prominent and sophisticated account of a mystical encounter with God.

I. Two Varieties of Omnipresence

A natural place to begin is with pantheism and its cousin, panentheism. Generic pantheism asserts that

¹ For biblical warrant Jews and Christians can advert to Psalm 139:7–12.

- (1) "God is identical with everything,"

while generic panentheism claims that

- (2) "God is in all things."²

The fundamental difference between (1) and (2) is a difference between the relations employed. (1) makes use of the relation of *identity*. (2) is founded on the relation of *inbeing*, the relation that x bears to y when x is inside y .³ Speciation occurs almost immediately on these two generic stalks. For example, "everything" in (1) could be interpreted distributively or collectively. Read distributively (1) is

- (1') God is identical with each individual thing.

Read collectively (1) is

- (1*) God is identical with the totality of all things.

The difference between (1') and (1*) is nontrivial, for the difference yields two metaphysically different kinds of pantheism. Suppose that "Alpha, ..., Omega," tagged as necessary with an infinite supply of subscripts, name all the physical individuals. Select any two individuals; for example, Alpha and Beta. (1') entails that God is identical with Alpha and that God is identical with Beta. Because identity is symmetric and transitive, it follows that Alpha is identical with Beta. The argument generalizes for any number of things in the field, from Alpha to Omega_∞. The upshot is that (1') licenses the conclusion that there is only one thing in existence and that God is that one thing. Since the stipulated field was all physical entities, we can conclude that God is the only physical entity.

To see how (1*) differs from (1'), note that (1*) is consistent with a state of affairs in which God is not identical with Alpha, not identical with Beta, ..., and not identical with Omega_∞ but is nonetheless identical with the mereological sum of Alpha + Beta + ... + Omega_∞. In other words God would be a *whole* whose parts are Alpha, Beta, ..., and Omega_∞. On the assumption that a whole

² A. P. Martinich, "Pantheism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, second edition, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 640–641.

³ I understand paradigm cases of inbeing to be such that when x is in y , y is physical, either a physical object or a region of physical space. Exceptions would require explanation.

composed entirely of physical objects is itself a physical object, it follows that God is one (gigantic) physical object.

Espousal of some variety of (1') is generally accompanied by reliance on a robust distinction between appearances and reality. There may appear to be all sorts of individual, isolated objects and persons, but in reality, each individual is identical with God and thus identical with every "other" individual. This sort of view is the *ne plus ultra* of divine omnipresence.⁴ (1*), in contrast, can recognize the real existence of individuals as fragments of divinity.

Pantheism, whose generic version is represented by (2), appeals to the relation of inbeing. Parallel to the case with (1), it is possible to discern two species:

(2') God is in each individual thing.

(2*) God is in the totality of all things.

The relation of inbeing has formal features that distinguish it from the relation of identity. Formally, identity is an equivalence relation, a relation that is reflexive, symmetric, and transitive. Identity's symmetry and transitivity underwrote the argument proceeding from (1') to the conclusion that God is the only existent being. Like identity, inbeing is transitive: if Fenway Park is in Boston and Boston is in Massachusetts, then Fenway Park is in Massachusetts. Unlike identity, inbeing is asymmetric. For any two physical objects, *x* and *y*, if *x* is in *y*, then *y* is not in *x*. Because inbeing is asymmetric, (2') does not lead to the conclusion that each individual thing is in every other individual thing. (2') allows that God can be in Fenway Park and in Yankee Stadium without entailing that the two stadiums are in each other. However, (2') does run the risk of conflicting with the principle that nothing can be in two places at the same time. According to this principle different parts but not the whole of God could be in different physical things simultaneously. Adherence to (2') would thus seem to require either denial of this principle or ascription of parts to God.⁵ (2*) appears to face the same difficulty. If God is in the totality of all things, "as water might saturate a sponge and in that way be in the entire sponge,"⁶ it would still be true that different quantities of God would be in different regions of matter.

⁴ In the Western tradition the lineage for this kind of monism can be traced back to Parmenides. Some versions of Hinduism identify Atman with Brahman. I am not knowledgeable enough to assess the relation between this identification and the view put forward in (1').

⁵ If the latter alternative were accepted, then (2') would have something in common with (1*); both would presuppose that divinity has parts.

⁶ Martinich, "Pantheism," p. 640. Martinich may be alluding to Augustine's use of the same analogy in describing his early adherence to Manichaeism; see *Confessions*, 7.5.7.

Let us take stock. In giving its account of divine omnipresence generic pantheism characterizes God's being present in an object as God's identity with the object in question. The requirement of *omni*-presence, when combined with identity, leads either to monism (only one thing exists) or to the view that each individual object is a fragment of divinity. The latter consequence invites the thought that the larger the aggregate of objects is, the more divine it is! If that thought is uncharitable or unacceptable, it is incumbent upon the pantheist to explain why. Generic panentheism substitutes inbeing for identity: distributively or collectively, God is in all things. If, as (2) would have it, God is in every individual thing, then a defender of (2) must be prepared to deny the universal validity of the principle that nothing can be in two or more places at the same time or to acquiesce in the notion that God has spatiotemporal parts.

In dwelling primarily on the metaphysics of generic pantheism and panentheism, I have not refuted these views. I have merely set a partial agenda for their further exploration. For example, so far the term "God" has functioned a bit like a cipher, designating what has only been described as a physical object or objects. One would like to know whether this God has or can have conscious mental attitudes, and if so, how those attitudes are related to physical phenomena. Pantheism and panentheism get high marks for accounting for God's immanence. But the accounts they give seem to leave little room for allowing for any kind of divine transcendence.⁷ Theists who hanker for some sort of transcendence reconcilable with immanence may want to look elsewhere.⁸

II. Aquinas on Omnipresence

One source that will repay examination is the first part of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas wastes little time in building a case for God's omnipresence in things. The crucial texts are contained in questions 3 and 8. Question 3 presents Aquinas's views on God's metaphysical simplicity. Those views are summed up at the beginning of his resolution of article 7 of question 3, "Whether God is composite in some way, or instead totally simple." He rings the changes on the ways in which a thing might be composite, in order to deny that any of them apply to God. God has no "quantitative parts," parts that have

⁷ A frequent criticism of Spinoza's slogan, *Deus sive Natura*, has been that by identifying God with nature, Spinoza's pantheism is really atheism.

⁸ For further discussion of these themes, see Robert Oakes, "Does Traditional Theism Entail Pantheism?," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 20 (1983), pp. 105–112; Edward Wierenga, "Anselm on Omnipresence," *The New Scholasticism*, 52 (1988), pp. 30–41; and Robert Oakes, "Divine Omnipresence and Maximal Immanence: Supernaturalism Versus Pantheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 43 (2006), pp. 171–179.

spatial spread or location, because God is not a body. As a corollary, God is not composed of form and matter. Nor is God's nature anything distinct from the bearer of that nature. Because that nature is to exist, God is existence itself. Aquinas finishes the toll by affirming that God is not composed of genus and differentia and that God has no accidental properties.⁹

Having shown that there is no composition in God, Aquinas immediately proceeds to ask in question 3, article 8 "Whether God enters into composition with other things." His answer is no. We should be sure that we understand what this denial means. It amounts to saying that there is and could be nothing in existence that has God as a physical or metaphysical component. Aquinas bases the denial on three theses. The first is that God is the first efficient cause of things. The second is that God is a being for whom the prerogative to act belongs *primo et per se*. These two terms of art will reappear later: henceforward I will translate them as "firstmost and essentially." The third thesis is that God is preeminent being, without qualification (*primum ens simpliciter*, 3, 8).¹⁰ Since a cause is always superior to any of its effects, God as first efficient cause cannot be identical to anything he brings about. As preeminent being—a being whose very nature is to be—God's mode of efficient causation is to bring things into existence. Thus God brings about everything other than himself. (These points are sufficient for Aquinas to deny pantheism.) In acting firstmost and essentially God brings things into existence without the aid of any kind of intermediary agency or preexisting matter. Subsequent argumentation is necessary to establish the latter claims, but Aquinas is well launched in that regard.¹¹ So far, however, it has not been shown that God cannot be a component of creatures.

Aquinas's argument to that conclusion relies on accepting this principle: if x is a component of y , then x is not y 's firstmost and essential actor. Aquinas supplies two examples (brought slightly up to date) chosen to illustrate the principle. Hands do not play a piano. It is rather that a human plays the piano by using her hands. Heat does not warm her hands; a fire does the warming by means of its heat (3, 8). The pianist and the fire are, relatively speaking, firstmost and essential actors. Hands are a *part* of the pianist. Heat is a *property* of

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 3, 7. Since all further references to the *Summa* are to the first part, I will shorten citations to question and article numbers. All translations are mine. Note that Aquinas's dismissal of various types of predication with God as subject does not rule out *identities*, such as "God = Being" or "God = Goodness." God's lack of "quantitative parts" would seem to deny pantheism's (2') and (2*), since the two theses presuppose that God can be partitioned. But we will see shortly that Aquinas is not averse to accepting (2') and (2*) when they are properly understood.

¹⁰ These claims had emerged from Aquinas's "five ways" to demonstrate God's existence, presented in 2, 3.

¹¹ See in this connection questions 44–45 and 104.

fire. Aquinas regards parts and properties as components.¹² Perhaps there are other ontological categories whose members would also count as components. If so, Aquinas does not enumerate them. If God were a component of Alpha, God would be a part or a property (or some other thing) attached to Alpha. In that case Alpha would be the firstmost and essential actor, not God. But this contradicts the second of Aquinas's three theses by denying God's status as firstmost and essential actor.

If pantheism and panentheism lay abundant stress on God's immanence, Aquinas's view can seem to overemphasize God's detached transcendence. If, as Aquinas's second thesis has it, God is the firstmost and essential actor, how is it that God is present in things—in *all* things—in order to act on them?

What question 3, article 8 has precluded is God's presence in things *as a component*. There might be some other way that God is present in things. Question 8 presents Aquinas's account of what that other way is. The question consists of four articles. Article 1 argues for God's existence in everything. Article 2 claims that God exists everywhere, that is, in every place. Article 3 seeks to justify the classification that God exists in everything by presence, power, and substance and in some things by grace. Finally, article 4 addresses the issue whether being everywhere is unique to God. Before turning to article 1 I would like to call attention to one claim made in article 2. The first few words of Aquinas's resolution of article 2 tell us that "place is a kind of thing." As such, place falls within the scope of "everything" argued for in article 1. The combination of articles 1 and 2 thus provides a unified picture of God's presence in the physical universe. Some places are occupied by physical objects; some are not. God is present, however, in all of them.¹³

The resolution of article 1 begins with a negative assertion and a positive assertion. "God is in everything, not, indeed, as a part of a substance or as an accident." (This is evidence in retrospect that the examples of hands and heat in question 3, article 8 were not chosen haphazardly.) The positive assertion is that God is in everything "as a mover is present to that in which it moves." Aquinas follows Aristotle in holding that for a mover to move something directly it must be in contact with the thing being moved. In the present case the contact cannot be the kind exemplified by one physical object striking another, because God is not a body. Even so, Aquinas maintains that the contact between God and physical beings is causal. His explanation employs two

¹² The pianist and the fire are only "relatively speaking" firstmost and essential actors. Because they have parts and properties in virtue of which they act, they are complex, unlike God.

¹³ Aquinas's reply to objection 4 of article 1 deals with God's omnipresence in the spiritual realm. God is present even in devils, inasmuch as they exist. Notice here that omnipresence in spiritual beings is a case that deviates from the paradigm cases of inbeing mentioned in note 3.

tactics. One is the thesis that God's essence is being itself (introduced in 3, 4). The other is an appeal to two analogies, one involving fire and the other the sun. The power proper to fire is its ability to set things on fire. The sun is necessary for the propagation of light throughout the atmosphere: air is illuminated when and only when the sun shines through it. Aquinas recruits the fire analogy in support of the claim that God's *esse* is, like fire's power, something dynamic, conferring *existence* on things. Thus unlike fire, which is often destructive, God's dynamism is creative. The sun analogy illustrates the thesis that God's dynamism is necessary for a thing's *continuing* to exist from one moment to the next: God's withdrawal of creative support from a being would reduce that being to nothingness.¹⁴

Aquinas finishes his argument in this fashion:

Therefore as long as a thing has being it must be that God is present to it according to the way that it has being. But being is that which is more intimate and more deeply present in everything than anything else is, since it is the formal respect in which all things are in reality, as is evident from what was said above. Hence it must be that God is in everything, and most intimately so. (8, 1)¹⁵

No one would accuse Aquinas of prolixity in this passage. What are the ways in which a thing may have being? I conjecture that Aquinas may have in mind any or all of the following. Aristotle's categories would inspire one to think that the way in which a substance exists is different from the way in which qualities exist, which in turn is different from the way in which relations exist, and so forth. Angels and souls exist in ways different from material objects.¹⁶ Universals, numbers, and other abstracta have their own ways of being. All of them have being in common; lacking that they would be—well, nonexistent. This is why being is “the formal respect in which all things are in reality.” To say that it is most intimate and most deeply present in everything that exists is to acknowledge that it is the ultimate scaffolding that supports everything's superstructure: nothing can be or do without it. But being is God's essence. So this, according to Aquinas, is how God is present in all things—by continually maintaining their very existence.

I alluded earlier to a seeming dilemma for panentheism: deny the universal validity of the principle that nothing can be in different places at the same time

¹⁴ One may recall Plato's famous analogies of the sun and cave. See *Republic* 6.507d–508d; 7.514a–517c.

¹⁵ The earlier passages to which Aquinas alludes are 3, 4; 4, 1, *ad* 3; and 7, 1.

¹⁶ See in this connection 12, 4.

or defend the thesis that God has parts. To put it mildly, Aquinas has no stake in defending the latter thesis. For Aquinas God has no parts whatsoever, be they physical or metaphysical. He is, however, eager to distinguish and thereby delimit the no-different-places-at-the-same-time principle. He considers the following argument:

That which exists wholly in some place does not exist beyond that place. But if God exists in some place he exists there wholly, for he does not have parts. Therefore he exists in nothing beyond that place. Therefore God does not exist everywhere. (8, 2, obj. 3)

This argument gets its life by playing off the elements of the panentheist's dilemma. Aquinas's strategy in response is to fault the argument for failing to distinguish the notion of a thing's being wholly in a place along with the concomitant notion of a part. Let us begin with parts. Some parts are metaphysical. Form and matter are metaphysical parts of physical substances; genus and differentia are metaphysical parts of species. In distinction, physical objects and the places they occupy have quantitative parts. The Green Monster is a physical object whose quantitative parts are contained wholly within Fenway Park. For as long as it is wholly contained in Fenway Park, no quantitative part of the Green Monster can exist elsewhere. Aquinas is happy to endorse the principle that "what is wholly in some place by virtue of the wholeness of its quantity cannot also be outside that place" (8, 2, *ad* 3). But he maintains that the principle does not hold for certain metaphysical parts that are present in something by the wholeness of their nature: "it need not be that what is wholly in something by virtue of the wholeness of its nature exists in no way outside that thing" (8, 2, *ad* 3). We can adapt Aquinas's illustrative example to apply to the Green Monster. The whole nature of greenness—or of this particular shade, call it Fenway Green—is present on the surface of the Green Monster and in each patch of greenness that is a part of the surface. But of course Fenway Green can also appear in its wholeness elsewhere, even in Yankee Stadium.

Aquinas is not about to assimilate the case of God to the way things stand with certain accidental properties. A more tempting approximation might be to the soul which, Aquinas believes, exists wholly in every part of the body (8, 2, *ad* 3). Perhaps, then, God is present in the world in the same way that Aquinas's soul is supposed to be present in Aquinas's body? Yes and no. In the process of examining some putative counterexamples to the thesis that God is the only omnipresent being, Aquinas considers a world whose only physical inhabitant is one animal. He concedes that in that world the animal's soul would be omnipresent. Even so, that animal soul would only partially fill the bill

required by divine omnipresence. Yes, God and the soul exist firstmost in that to which they are respectively present. That is, they are present as a whole in the whole and in every part of the whole. No, the soul in the one-animal world would not be omnipresent essentially but only accidentally. With the introduction of a second animal into the one-animal world, the first animal's soul would cease to be omnipresent. Moreover, there are countless other possible worlds in which that first animal does not exist. But God is not accidentally omnipresent. God would be omnipresent in every possible world. Were the one-animal world actual, God would be omnipresent in it but without the liability that the one-animal soul has of losing that status. As Aquinas puts it:

Thus when something is such that wherever it is placed, it follows that it is omnipresent in that place, it is essentially omnipresent. And this applies to God alone, since however many places are supposed—even if infinitely many are to be supposed beyond those which exist—God would have to be in all of them, because nothing can exist except through him. So therefore to be omnipresent firstmost and essentially applies to God and to him alone, since however many places are supposed, it must be that God is in all of them, and not in part but in himself. (8, 4)

To sum up Aquinas's position: God is perfectly simple, the being whose nature is to be, whose essence is being itself. Because God causes all other beings to exist and causes are always superior to their effects, God cannot be identical to creatures, taken individually or collectively. Nor can God be any kind of component of a creature or creatures. Nonetheless God is present in all creatures in virtue of initiating and sustaining their existence. What is more, the entirety of God can be and is present in each creature and present in each part of each creature, firstmost and essentially. The arguments for these conclusions rely on principles that are not beyond challenge. I suspect that many theists will find the general contours of Aquinas's position attractive even if they are uncertain about its soundness. The position provides grounds for denying generic pantheism while being compatible with a particular version of panentheism. As long as the panentheist is willing to concede that God is a spiritual being whose very essence is to bring about the existence of all other beings, Aquinas can accept propositions (2') and (2*).

III. Hiddenness

Aquinas's position promises to lessen if not resolve the tension between immanence and transcendence. Divine simplicity entails that God is above the

natural world, transcending all the categories necessary for an adequate description of creation. Divine creativity entails that God is immanent in the created world by causing and sustaining it. But the position raises a problem about God's hiddenness. If God is in and around us at all times, how can it be that so many of us are unaware of God's presence? Let me sharpen my question. I am not asking how it can be that a loving God frequently greets our prayers with silence. That is a serious question that deserves and has received serious and thoughtful discussion.¹⁷ My question pertains more to epistemology than to theodicy. How is it that God's presence is so easily overlooked?

Here is a sampling of possible answers. *Because God's presence is ubiquitous and inescapable, we never have witnessed and never will witness God's absence.* This answer might go on to draw an analogy to the Pythagoreans' answer to the question why we do not hear the harmony of the celestial spheres: "We are continually hearing it; we have never *not* heard it. You are confusing its universal presence with its universal absence."

I do not think that we should allow Aquinas's position to associate with the Pythagoreans' charming fantasy. Not so much because the fantasy is a fantasy but rather because its defense rests on a dubious principle. The principle is that in order to be aware of the presence of some phenomenon, one has to be aware of what its absence would be like. This principle in turn may draw for support on a principle to the effect that there can be no feature of the world that is universally applicable, such that nothing in the world lacks that feature. Of course appeal to such a principle would beg the question against Aquinas's claim that being is bestowed on everything in the world by God. And so if the former, epistemological principle somehow relies on the latter, metaphysical one, the Pythagorean analogy is a poisoned pawn.

But being hardly counts as a feature. Kant observed that there is no difference in descriptive features between a real hundred thalers and a merely possible hundred thalers. Supplement that with Austin's remark that "Exist' . . . is a verb, but it does not describe something that things do all the time, like breathing, only quieter—ticking over, as it were, in a metaphysical sort of way."¹⁸ Small wonder, then, that God's presence, as being itself, is so hard to detect!

One presumes that Kant would be unwilling to swap his real hundred thalers for my imaginary hundred thalers. Why is that? The straightforward answer

¹⁷ For examples, see Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (eds.), *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); J. L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Michael C. Rea, "Narrative, Liturgy, and the Hiddenness of God," in Kevin Timpe (ed.), *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 76–96; and Terence Cuneo, "Another Look at Divine Hiddenness," *Religious Studies*, 49 (2013), pp. 151–164.

¹⁸ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 68.

is that his real currency has causal powers in the real world that my imaginary currency lacks. Call these “unmediated causal powers,” powers that do not depend on how Kant’s thalers are imagined or represented.¹⁹ Kant could, for example, use them to purchase a first edition copy of Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature*. If a copy were to come on the market today no amount of imaginary dollars would pry it away from Bauman’s. Being brings unmediated causal powers to things. These causal powers will vary depending on a thing’s kind. Diamonds have the power to scratch corundum. Catnip has the power to fascinate cats. Bats have the power of echolocation. Humans have the communicative powers enabled by possession of a language. In short, no being, no unmediated causal powers. Recall that Aquinas refers to being as “that which is more intimate and more deeply present in everything than anything else is, since it is the formal respect in which all things are in reality.” God’s conferring being on things not only brings and keeps them in existence; it also forms them into existing as the kinds of things they are, in possession of the powers typical of their kind. It is potentially misleading even to characterize God’s activity as “conferring” being on things, as if the things were somehow already physically there, ready to receive being as a wall is primed to receive a coat of paint. For Aquinas, God’s way of bringing something into existence is by creation *ex nihilo*. In creating a horse, God does not assemble some preexisting equine-appropriate parts as a mason assembles a chimney out of bricks. God creates a swift, nickering, herbivorous quadruped where before there was sheer nonbeing.²⁰ If being just is the divine instantiation of unmediated causal powers then it is not anything as refined as “breathing, only quieter.”

Aristotle pointed out that visual perception works only when there is some distance between the eye and the object perceived. Jam the object up against the eye and you will disable or destroy the eye. By Aquinas’s own lights, God is closer to us than anything else is. It should not surprise us, then, if that ultimate closeness prevents us from properly detecting God.

This analogy between visual perception and awareness of God is not persuasive. Aristotle also pointed out that there are other sense modalities, touch and taste, whose correct operation does depend on contact with the object sensed. If some types of perceptual awareness require that there *not* be a medium between sense and sensibilia, it is fair to suppose that awareness of God should be like that, adjusted, of course, for spiritual rather than physical awareness. Then our question resurfaces: why are we not aware of God’s presence in this way?

¹⁹ I borrow the phrase from Lynne Rudder Baker and Gareth B. Matthews, “Anselm’s Argument Reconsidered,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, 64 (2010–2011), pp. 31–54.

²⁰ See 45, 1–5.

We have not yet found an adequate answer to the question why God's presence can be so easily overlooked. Augustine had an autobiographical answer. While acknowledging that God is omnipresent and thus present to Augustine at all times, Augustine had willfully ignored God's presence.²¹ God was not hiding; Augustine was futilely trying to hide from God. Augustine's account of willful disregard may also apply to many other people, but it cannot be the whole story. Devout believers who yearn to know God more directly may find their efforts thwarted or only fleetingly successful.²² Nor can one get very far by attributing hiddenness to God as a lover's ploy. The argument might go something like this: *Imagine a wealthy suitor who wishes that he be loved in return not for his wealth but for who he is and what projects he values. Such a suitor might wish to conceal his wealth for fear that knowledge of it will taint the motives of those whose love he seeks. So it is with God. Love for God must be properly motivated. God must realize that a full-blown divine epiphany is likely to induce fearful obsequiousness instead of freely based worship.* Perhaps so, but one might expect God to be the maestro of nuanced epiphanies. The wealthy suitor analogy invites the skeptic's reply that the Wealthy Suitor par excellence seems to be excessively bashful or extremely stingy.

I suggest a different way of accounting for God's hiddenness. The account is founded on the metaphysical differences between God and the created world. It makes no attempt to explain why God created this particular world: it simply takes this world as a given. The account is based on Aquinas's views, views shared by many others.

The created world is a world populated by beings of varying degrees of complexity. Some of them are material objects occupying regions of space and having histories that unfold seriatim in time. Let us suppose that angels and souls are temporal but have no spatial spread. All such beings, material and spiritual, are subject to various kinds of change. In addition to accidental and locational changes, material beings are capable of generation and liable to corruption, the assembly and dispersal, typically, of things that were already in existence. Generation and corruption are not to be confused with the creation and annihilation, which are God's exclusive prerogative. Although God makes possible every change in any object, God is not the subject of any kind of change. To recall, God is a being whose essence is existence itself, located simultaneously in all places and as a whole at all times, whose eternity is "the simultaneously whole and perfect possession of illimitable life."²³

²¹ On God's omnipresence, see *Confessions*, 5.2.2; 6.3.4; 8.3.8; and 9.8.18. For Augustine's willful resistance to God's presence, see 1.2.2–3.3 and 5.9.16.

²² Augustine reports such a fleeting episode in *Confessions*, 9.10.24.

²³ *Aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*, endorsing Boethius's definition; 10, 1.

Acceptance of Aquinas's account of God's nature, with its inclusion of omnipresence, does not alleviate the worry that the account separates God's mode of existence so radically from our human mode of existence that it would be impossible for us ever to "detect" God. If anything, acceptance heightens the worry. It could seem then, ironically, that divine hiddenness is a necessary consequence of divine omnipresence.

The consequence depends, however, on what we are willing to count as "detection" and on what detective devices we have at our disposal. It is not surprising that Aquinas credits us with having reason, five external senses, and four internal senses; that is, common sense, imagination, instinct, and memory.²⁴ Aquinas famously thinks that reason alone is inadequate to provide a logical demonstration of God's existence based solely on indubitable first principles. To be sure, God's existence, says Aquinas, is self-evident in itself but not self-evident to us in the way that the principle of noncontradiction is self-evident to us. In this respect we are like the mathematically unsophisticated who are correct in supposing that Fermat's Conjecture is necessarily true if it is true at all, but who cannot follow the proof that it is true. Even if Anselm's ontological argument validly delivers its conclusion by means of impeccable inferences from premises that are self-evident first principles, the argument may not deliver self-evidence to us about its conclusion. Validity can remain undiluted while epistemic warrant peters out. Moreover, the conclusion itself—that "that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in reality"—gives us, at best, a descriptive phrase that is supposed to refer exclusively to God.

Reason can be supplemented by sensory evidence. The external senses provide raw, instantaneous "snapshots" of the external world, which are then synthesized downstream by the common sense, memory, and imagination into temporally continuous reports of events playing out in an ever-changing world.²⁵ We can thus recognize recurrent causal patterns in nature, patterns that lead Aquinas to put forward what is probably the most familiar of his five

²⁴ Common sense enables one to be aware that one is exercising an external sense, for example, being aware of hearing a trio perform (with or without seeing the trio). Imagination allows for the construction of images of things one has never experienced. Instinct provides one with unlearned capacities that promote one's survival. Memory is a repository of sensory images of particular things or events one has experienced. For a thorough discussion of Aquinas's philosophy of mind see Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa theologiae 1a* 75–89 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁵ Memory and imagination are instrumental to an agent's planning courses of action and executing the planned steps in the right sequential order. Both are anchored in time and necessary for humans who must cope in a world that unfolds in time. Both are distinctively *creaturely*; God, qua eternal, has no need for them.

proofs of God's existence. Its conclusion is that there must be "a first mover that is moved by nothing. And this everyone understands to be God." The argument depends on two causal principles,

(3) Nothing causes itself,

and

(4) No causal sequence can be infinitely long.

Given Aquinas's disdain for a priori demonstrations of God's existence we expect that he should regard (3) and (4) as non-self-evident principles. Aquinas does indeed offer arguments for and refinements of them. Critics have regarded the arguments—and the principles themselves—as less than compelling. I shall not pursue the issues here.²⁶ What I do want to emphasize is that the argument's conclusion is another descriptive phrase alleged to fit God and God alone. The argument thus has this much in common with Anselm's argument.

How could it be otherwise? Arguments are exercises in reasoning whose ingredients are propositions. The categorematic terms occurring in propositions are terms referring to concepts that, for Aquinas, must be derived from sensory experience.²⁷ I suggest, then, that it is not accidental that Aquinas's proofs do not employ the term "God" *in their content*. It is only after the proof has concluded that Aquinas appends a statement like *et hoc dicimus Deum* ("and this we call 'God'"); and the "*hoc*" always picks out a descriptive phrase. Aquinas claims that his proofs proceed from effects to cause because we are more familiar with the way the physical world works than we are with its cause. He regards this style of argument as the only option in the present case: though effects are always sufficient to argue for the existence of their cause (lest they not be effects!), they do not always provide complete knowledge of the cause's nature. In the present case we are aware of effects that are finite, but their cause is supposed to be an infinite being (2, 2, *ad* 3). In short, reason supplemented with the senses can only take us so far in detecting God. The descriptive phrases that are the conclusions of Aquinas's arguments function as theoretical terms that offer what one might hope is the best explanation for what we

²⁶ For details see my "Proofs for God's Existence," in Richard Cross and J. T. Paasch (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Taylor and Francis / Routledge, forthcoming).

²⁷ Aquinas endorses Aristotle's claim that the intellect is "like a tablet on which nothing [initially] is written"; 84, 3. See the nuanced discussion of the extent of Aquinas's empiricism in Pasnau, *Aquinas on Human Nature*, pp. 302–310.

observe.²⁸ As is often the case, the referents of theoretical terms may be observationally inaccessible to us.

I have emphasized the fact that arguments like Anselm's and Aquinas's have descriptive phrases for their conclusions. The emphasis invites the thought that there may be nothing satisfying the descriptions. In Anselm's case one might worry that there is no greatest conceivable being: for any being one can conceive of, one can conceive of a greater being. The suspicion that one might harbor in Aquinas's case is that even if there is an unmoved mover, that being might not fill the bill of praiseworthy attributes—omniscience, impeccability, perfect justice—that flow more naturally from Anselm's description. One might consequently doubt whether there is a possibility of ever becoming *acquainted* directly with God, who is, be it recalled, the ground of one's being.

IV. Eckhart's Mysticism

Mystical theology can be elaborate, but at its core is the notion of a mystical experience.²⁹ Such experiences can be brought about by a wide variety of sources or circumstances—a glorious sunset, a performance of Bach's Mass in B minor, intense contemplation, an episode of apparently inconsolable grief, and more. In any case they seem to be brief but welcome, for their effects on the persons undergoing them can be long-lasting and profoundly moving, ranging from awe to joy to tranquility. I propose to set aside further exploration of the phenomenology and affective dimensions of mystical experiences and concentrate instead on those features that bear on the phenomenon of God's hiddenness. The title of Augustin Poulain's book, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, calls attention to two pervasive features of mystical experiences of God. They are "graces," freely given by God and not measured by the recipient's merits. They can be bidden or unbidden. No regimen is sufficient to ensure an experience, and in some reported cases, no preparation is necessary. Nonetheless, "interior prayer" is frequently recommended. Interior prayer begins with a kind of meditation whose aim is to make the meditator more receptive to God's grace. I choose Meister Eckhart for illustrative purposes. Like Aquinas, Eckhart was a member of the Dominican order, one generation younger than Aquinas. I do

²⁸ As such they are vulnerable in two ways. There may be a gap between what is required to fill the role of first mover, for instance, and what is required for a being to count as God. And alternative theoretical accounts may be invoked to account for the same observational evidence.

²⁹ See, for example, A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer: A Treatise on Mystical Theology*, tenth edition (1922, reprinted by St. Pius X Press, n.d.); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1925); and Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union: An Essay on the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

not know how much Eckhart may have absorbed of Aquinas's teachings. Eckhart's recommendation for successful meditation fits within the framework of Aquinas's metaphysics of the mind. Here is a passage from one of Eckhart's sermons that describes how the soul operates in the physical world.

Whatever the soul does, it does through agents. It understands by means of intelligence. If it remembers, it does so by means of memory. If it is to love, the will must be used and thus it acts always through agents and not within its own essence. Its results are achieved through an intermediary. The power of sight can be effectuated only through the eyes, for otherwise the soul has no means of vision. It is the same with the other senses. They are effectuated through intermediaries. . . . When the agents of the soul contact creatures, they take and make ideas and likenesses of them and bear them back again into the self. It is by means of these ideas that the soul knows about external creatures. Creatures cannot approach the soul except in this way and the soul cannot get at creatures, except, on its own initiative, it first conceive ideas of them. Thus the soul gets at things by means of ideas and the idea is an entity created by the soul's agents. Be it a stone, or a rose, or a person, or whatever it is that is to be known, first an idea is taken and then absorbed, and in this way the soul connects with the phenomenal world.³⁰

In dealing with the physical world the soul makes use of its "agents"; understanding, will, the external senses, and at least two of Aquinas's internal senses; namely, memory and imagination. Physical things affect the agents directly, the soul only indirectly. What the soul interacts with directly are "ideas," images or representations of the physical things, images created by the agents. Eckhart makes it clear that a person is not to be identified with the sum of its agents: "The soul's agents, by which it acts, are derived from the core of the soul" (p. 97). There is a hierarchical ontology here. All our ideas are parasitic entities, dependent for their creation and existence on the soul's agents, which in turn depend on the soul's core. Because all our ideas originate from without, it follows that we have no idea of our soul: "Thus it knows about everything else but has no self-knowledge" (p. 97).

Humans have acquired a stockpile of ideas that enable them to cope with the world. God, in contrast, has no need whatsoever for ideas. Eckhart's argument rests on God's perfection and simplicity.

³⁰ "This is Meister Eckhart from whom God hid nothing," in *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1941), pp. 96–97. Citations in my text refer to Blakney's edition.

Whatever skill a master teacher may have, concede that skill to God, multiplied beyond measure. The wiser and more skillful a teacher is, the more simply, and with less artifice, he achieves his ends. Man requires many tools to do his visible work and, before he can finish it as he has conceived it, much preparation is required. It is the function and craft of the moon and the sun to give light and they do it swiftly. When they emit their rays, all the ends of the world are filled with light in a moment. Higher than these are the angels who work with fewer instruments and also with fewer ideas. The highest seraph has only one. He comprehends as unity all that his inferiors see as manifold. But God needs no ideas at all, nor has he any. He acts in the soul without instrument, idea, or likeness. He acts in the core of the soul, which no idea ever penetrated—but he alone—his own essence. No creature can do this. (pp. 97–98)

If God has no ideas, then “God has no idea of himself and no likeness” (p. 99). A fortiori, when God acts in the core of the soul, God does not do so by communicating ideas or likenesses.

The very adeptness with which the soul’s agents navigate through a world of physical objects renders them an impediment when it comes to acquaintance with God. How, then, should one deal with them? Eckhart presents two options:

Should one construct an idea in his mind and thinking-process and discipline himself by meditating upon it, to the effect that God is wise, almighty, and eternal? Or should one withdraw from all thought and free his mind of words, acts, and ideas, doing nothing but being always receptive to God and allowing him to act? (p. 96)

His answer is that “good and perfect persons only . . . know that the best life and the loftiest is to be silent and to let God speak and act through one” (p. 99). Eckhart’s prescription, based on two biblical texts, follows immediately.

When all the agents [of the soul] are withdrawn from action and ideation, then this word is spoken. Thus he said: “Out of the silence, a secret word was spoken to me.” The more you can withdraw the agents of your soul and forget things and the ideas you have received hitherto, the nearer you are to [hearing this word] and the more sensitive to it you will be. If you could only become unconscious of everything all at once and ignore your whole life, as St. Paul did when

he could say: "Whether in the body, or out of it, I cannot tell: God knoweth!" His spirit had so far withdrawn all its agents that the body was forgotten. Neither memory nor intellect functioned, nor the senses, nor any [of the soul's] agents which are supposed to direct or grace the body.³¹

In the previous paragraph I characterized the kind of awareness the mystic seeks as "acquaintance with God." A century ago Bertrand Russell distinguished between what he called knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.³² Following Russell's lead we can say that a description may or may not refer to something; whether it does refer depends on its descriptive content matching something that exists. A definite description in particular always has some descriptive content (by definition!) that sets the agenda for determining what, if anything, its reference is. Thus, entertaining a definite descriptive phrase requires mental activity: if Aquinas is right, the activity relies on concepts acquired by means of the senses. It is clear that Eckhart is advocating nothing like this: we are not to meditate on "the being than which none greater can be conceived" or "the unmoved mover." We are instead to "withdraw" our agents, *all* of them.

Russell regards "acquaintance" as a term of art, defined, I suggest, by the following features. (A) Acquaintance is a two-place relation, both of whose relata must exist in order for the relation to hold. I might wish it to be otherwise, but I cannot be acquainted with Jane Eyre or Sherlock Holmes. (B) In order for x to be acquainted with y , existing y must be *presented* to x .³³ One can be acquainted with something, y , without gaining that acquaintance by matching y to a previously established descriptive dossier. Presentation may just be *sans phrase*. (C) If x is acquainted with y , x 's acquaintance is direct, immediate, and noninferential. (D) If x is acquainted with y , then x *cannot* literally describe y . That is, there is no nonanalogical, nonmetaphorical dossier for y that is accessible to x . Feature (D) thus stakes out a stronger claim than feature (B).

It is fair to assume that Eckhart believes that the experience that results from successfully following his prescription would have features (A)–(D).

³¹ P. 99; bracketed interpolations by translator. The first biblical passage is a creative rendition of Wisd. of Sol. 18:14–15 The second is from 2 Cor. 12:2–3.

³² "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," as reprinted in Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., n.d.), pp. 202–224. Given Russell's atheism the book title is ironically appropriate for my purposes.

³³ Russell thought that presentation was the converse relation of acquaintance. See *Mysticism and Logic*, pp. 202–203.

- (A) The withdrawal of the subject's agents still leaves the subject, what Eckhart calls "the core of the soul":

In that core is the central silence, the pure peace, and abode of the heavenly birth, the place for this event: this utterance of God's word. By nature the core of the soul is sensitive to nothing but the divine Being, unmediated. Here God enters the soul with all he has and not in part. He enters the soul through its core and nothing may touch that core except God himself. No creature enters it, for creatures must stay outside in the soul's agents, from whence the soul receives ideas, behind which it has withdrawn as if to take shelter. (p. 97)

God is the partner with whom the subject becomes acquainted, the being who presents himself to the subject.

- (B) Eckhart describes the experience as a "heavenly birth" and an "utterance of God's word." The two descriptions are metaphorical. I suspect that for Eckhart they are related. John describes Christ as the Word of God (John 1:1–3). The Nicene Creed maintains that Christ is "the only son of God, . . . begotten, not made." I shall return to Eckhart's use of these identifications shortly. It is clear that by having withdrawn all agents, the subject of the experience is in no position to match the experience's object to a dossier.
- (C) On the subject's side of the acquaintance relation, God's presence is experienced directly. No perceptual agents are engaged in their image-synthesizing activities. The analytic, inferential, and deliberative functions of reason and will are offline. On God's side of the relation, the encounter is "unmediated." It is not brokered by any being other than God, not even, say, the "highest seraph," because the highest seraph is (or would be) one of God's creatures, and no creature can enter the core of the soul.
- (D) This feature helps to explain why mystics claim that their experiences are ineffable while nonetheless generating a considerable, figurative literature trying to describe them.³⁴ Note that Eckhart says that "God enters the soul with all he has and not in part." We have seen that according to Aquinas, God has no parts or properties; according to Eckhart, God has no ideas. If none of these categories apply to God then mystics are left literally speechless when it comes to describing the object of their experience.

³⁴ See James, *Varieties*, and Pike, *Mystic Union*, for examples.

As a consequence it is not easy to discern what can have transpired with the “heavenly birth,” the “utterance of God’s word.” In another sermon Eckhart offers this description:

In eternity the Father begets the Son in his own likeness. “The Word was with God and the Word was God.” Like God, it had his nature. Furthermore, I say that God has begotten him in my soul. Not only is the soul like him and he like it, but he is in it, for the Father begets his Son in the soul exactly as he does in eternity and not otherwise. He must do so whether he will or not. The Father ceaselessly begets his Son and, what is more, he begets me as his Son—the self-same Son! Indeed, I assert that he begets me not only as his Son but as himself and himself as myself, begetting me in his own nature, his own being. . . . All God’s works are one and therefore He begets me as he does his Son and without distinction. . . . I am identically his Son and no other, because the Father does only one kind of thing, making no distinctions. Thus it is that I am his only begotten Son.³⁵

It is hardly surprising that this passage would alarm Eckhart’s contemporary religious authorities. On its face it conflicts with the Nicene Creed twice over; first by denying that Christ is God’s only begotten son, second by identifying Christ with Eckhart. It imputes only one action to God and claims, to boot, that God had no choice but to perform that action. Finally, Eckhart’s view, suitably and irresistibly generalized, would seem to lead to pantheism: everyone—and everything—is identical with the one thing that is begotten by God and that is God.

I find the passage difficult to decipher yet all the more fascinating on that account. The interpretation I offer is guided by the principle that Eckhart is not trying to flout established Christian doctrine or the salient teachings of his Dominican order. He is instead attempting to use those doctrines and teachings to gesture at the inexpressible, to depict what it would be like to understand and love *sub specie aeternitatis*. My interpretation consists of observations on Eckhart’s use of “begets,” his telegraphic allusions to a pair of doctrines, and his apparent confusion about the ramifications of the doctrine of God’s simplicity.

The passage is dominated by the imagery of begetting, imagery that calls to mind the unique relation of loving that parents bear to their children. The Father begets the Son in the Father’s own likeness. Aquinas had taught that like all other beings with a will, God loves himself and wills the good for

³⁵ “Justice is even,” in *Meister Eckhart*, p. 181.

himself. But God is perfect goodness itself. So God wills himself for himself.³⁶ That is, God endorses his nature; there is nothing else God would rather be. But love of self when the self is perfectly good cannot remain isolated. It is time to comment on the first of the pair of doctrines that Eckhart employs. He asserts that God must beget “whether he will or not.” In his defense against charges of heresy, Eckhart appealed to the authority of Pseudo-Dionysius: “As for the words ‘he must do so,’ they are true, but it is an emphatic expression, commending God’s goodness and love. He is wholly good by essence and his goodness does not allow him to be without offspring.”³⁷ Eckhart appeals to what has come to be known as the *Dionysian Principle*: “Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and (thereby) of being.”³⁸ The Dionysian Principle implies that God must be prolific. To suppose that God need not create anything while remaining God is akin to supposing that a waterfall could dry up while retaining its status as a waterfall. Begetting supplements the Dionysian Principle by entailing parental love for what is begotten.³⁹

Why risk condemnation by claiming to be begotten by God? Why aggravate the risk by claiming to be God’s only begotten Son? In answer to the first question I suggest that begetting underscores more clearly what creating does not; namely, that God loves what he creates.⁴⁰ Eckhart chooses to depict that love as parental—Eckhart is a child of God. The answer I suggest for the second question requires some stage-setting. At the beginning of the passage Eckhart follows John in identifying the Son with the Word. This is the second of the pair of doctrines employed by Eckhart. Paul describes Christ as “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). Augustine identifies Christ as “the teacher,” who illuminates the soul about truths that words, ideas and images are powerless to establish.⁴¹ Eckhart has ample justification, then, for claiming that in a mystical experience it is the Son who enters the soul’s core; that this is the way the Father “begets” the Son in Eckhart’s soul. There is no trafficking of images, ideas, or words between the Son and Eckhart’s soul: not from Eckhart’s side, for he has succeeded in suspending all ideation; not

³⁶ See *Summa Theologiae*, 20, 1, ad 3.

³⁷ “The Defense,” chap. 9, par. 38, in *Meister Eckhart*, p. 296.

³⁸ Norman Kretzmann, “A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?,” in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 217.

³⁹ Upon Jesus’ baptism, God proclaims, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

⁴⁰ Eckhart need only cite John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life,” to confirm a high level of divine love for creation.

⁴¹ See, for example, *De Magistro*, esp. 11.36–14–46.

from the Son's side, for the Son has need of fewer ideas than even the highest seraph. There is, however, action. As Eckhart puts it,

Action and becoming are one. If the carpenter does no work, the house is not built. When his broadax stops, the structure stops. God and I are one in process. He acts and I become, just as fire changes anything that is thrown into the fire, so that it takes the nature of fire. Wood does not change fire into wood but the fire does change wood.⁴²

The last sentence emphasizes an asymmetrical relationship between fire and wood, implying that God is the dynamic agent and Eckhart the patient. Still, it is easy to misapply the fire/wood analogy. Fire works by destroying wood, not a reassuring prospect for the neophyte mystic. Even so we can exploit the fire imagery. Fire can both heat and illuminate its object without destroying it. Illumination can be used—metaphorically, of course—to describe the Word's activity in the core of Eckhart's soul. Heat may then serve to describe the warmth of an influx of boundless love.

To sum up what I take to be Eckhart's uses of "beget": in describing the Father as begetting the Son, Eckhart conforms to Christian orthodoxy while stressing the notion of parental love. When Eckhart says that the Father begets the Son in the core of Eckhart's soul, this is a way of maintaining that the Son, or the Word, is the proximate agent of Eckhart's enlightenment and awareness of God's love. (It is not as if the Son is a casual visitor. If God is omnipresent, the Son has been there all along, waiting, as it were, for Eckhart to seek him.) Eckhart's soul is like the Son, at least inasmuch as both are spiritual entities. Eckhart takes that affinity to warrant a claim of being a quasi-sibling of the Son, a kinship founded in the Father's having begot them both, which in turn generates the ties of love that kinship entails.

I come now to what appears to be confusion on Eckhart's part regarding God's simplicity. We can begin with two claims embedded in the passage we have been examining:

(5) "All God's works are one,"

and

(6) "The Father does only one kind of thing, making no distinctions."

⁴² "Justice is even," in *Meister Eckhart*, p. 182.

(5) is vague. Interpreted as

(5') God performs one single act,

it is a consequence of God's simplicity: recall Eckhart's assertion that "the wiser and more skillful a teacher is, the more simply . . . he achieves his ends." If God performed two acts God would not be simple. It follows from (5') that if God begets the Son and God begets Eckhart, then one and the same divine act results in the Son and Eckhart. But it does not follow, as Eckhart seems to think, that Eckhart is "identically his Son and no other." This would follow, perhaps, if (5') were supplemented with

(5*) A single act can have only one single outcome.

I shall argue in the next paragraph that (5*) is false. As for (6), I assume that the unique kind of action it ascribes to God is the conferring of existence on things. Interpreted in this way, (6) does nothing to identify Eckhart with the Son.

God's simplicity does entail that God's act is one eternal action which includes begetting the Son, creating Eckhart, and, so one supposes, granting Eckhart a mystical experience. That one act can have many outcomes is no mystery even to us temporal creatures. Alpha's flipping the switch turns on the light, startling Beta who drops the urn that spills its marbles upon which Beta slips and falls, knocking Beta unconscious. Alpha flipped the switch; Alpha turned on the light; Alpha startled Beta; Alpha caused Beta to drop the urn; Alpha made Beta spill the marbles; Alpha immobilized Beta.⁴³ Because the sequence beginning with Alpha's switch-flipping is temporal, the plausibility of ascribing later and later elements to Alpha as agent will diminish. However, all the upshots of God's act that we see playing out in time are equally present and part of the content of God's eternal act. By keeping all temporal things in existence from one moment to the next, God is present to them at every time they exist.

V. Conclusion

Did Eckhart ever have a mystical experience? Or was he simply imagining what the experience must be like? The answers to these questions are of some biographical interest. But the questions serve to highlight a more philosophical

⁴³ This sequence illustrates what Joel Feinberg called the "accordion effect": "an action, like the folding musical instrument, can be squeezed down to a minimum or else stretched way out." "Action and Responsibility," in Joel Feinberg, *Doing and Deserving: Essays in the Theory of Responsibility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 134.

point. Whether Eckhart is reporting or fabricating, his description is composed of various canonical and philosophical doctrines of his time, place, and background—the Trinity, divine simplicity, God’s eternity, the Dionysian Principle. Add to these a philosophical psychology consistent with Aquinas’s, including concept empiricism, and it follows that *any* description Eckhart can give, real or imagined, must make use of metaphors, similes, analogies, allusions, and the philosophical and theological doctrines available to him. To put it in other terms, if, as Eckhart suggests, the mystic is simply *presented* with God, with no mediation of concepts or ideas possible, then the experience is ineffable. Eckhart may have become acquainted with God, but the minutes of the meeting are blank.⁴⁴

The project of reconciling divine immanence with transcendence generates the problem of divine hiddenness. Aquinas’s account of immanence as creation and continuation promises to reconcile it with transcendence. But Aquinas’s account is silent on the issue of hiddenness. One legend has it that late in life Aquinas had a mystical experience, after which his writing ceased. Whereof one cannot speak, one must be silent.

⁴⁴ If mystics the world over report that their experiences are ineffable, one might conclude that the experiences are the same the world over; that there is a “universal core” around which different religions spin their respective traditions. I see no reason to believe this. See my “The Epistemology of Religious Experience,” in Paul Copan and Chad Meister (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 9–22.

SECTION II

MODALITY

Necessity

Philosophical reflection on theism has produced two controversial theses connecting the concepts of God and necessity. Many theists, emphasizing the difference between God and creatures, have insisted that although the existence of creatures is a contingent matter, God's existence is necessary. Some theists, in an effort to stress God's sovereignty over everything, have claimed that God's creative activity is responsible not only for all contingent matters but also for all necessary matters. Taken separately, each thesis has drawn philosophical criticism. Taken together, they appear to be incompatible. If God's existence is necessary, then there would seem to be at least one necessary truth for which God is not responsible—the truth that God exists necessarily. Someone inclined to defend both theses must be prepared to argue that God's necessary existence is compatible with God's complete sovereignty. Philosophical assessment of the theses requires analysis of the notion of necessary truth.

Prospects are bleak for producing a definition of necessary truth that does not presuppose the concept under definition (Adams 1983). For example, the characterization of a necessary truth as a proposition, p , whose negation entails a contradiction, is doubly indebted to the concept. For what distinguishes a contradiction from other types of proposition that might be entailed by the negation of p is the fact that a contradiction is *necessarily false*, a notion scarcely intelligible apart from the notion of necessary truth. Moreover, the relation of entailment employed in the characterization is such that for two propositions, q and r , q entails r if and only if it is *impossible* for q to be true and r false; that is, if and only if the conjunction of q with the negation of r is necessarily false. This kind of definitional circularity does not seem to be vicious. It may merely be symptomatic of how fundamental the notion of necessity is to our thought. Even without a definition, most people believe that some propositions are true necessarily. Tautologies—sentences like “Either the earth has an atmosphere or the earth does not have an atmosphere” and “If the atomic number of gold is 79, then it is not the case that the

atomic number of gold is not 79"—appear to constitute the clearest examples. Other putative but more controversial cases of necessary truths include " $1 + 2 = 3$," "Everything that is red is extended in space," and "All cows are ruminants."

Despite the presumptive case in favor of necessary truths, some philosophers have found reason for questioning whether any proposition is necessarily true, especially if there is an omnipotent God. It will be convenient to examine the issues in the context of Gottfried Leibniz's imagery of possible worlds (see Mates 1986, chs. 4 and 6). Many contemporary philosophers have characterized contingent truths as propositions that are true in some possible worlds and false in others, while necessary truths, if there are any, are propositions true in every possible world. This characterization still involves circularity if the explication of the notion of a possible world involves, for instance, the concept of a maximally consistent set of propositions, because propositions p and q are consistent if and only if the conjunction of p and q is not necessarily false. Even so, the notion of possible worlds has heuristic value, emphasizing that necessity involves invariability throughout all possible situations.

Several remarks made in the writings of René Descartes (for texts, see Frankfurt 1977; Curley 1984) have led interpreters to ascribe to him the doctrine that whether there are or can be any necessary truths depends somehow on God's omnipotence. Let us call the general principle that God's omnipotence makes a difference to the status of necessary truths "the Cartesian principle." Its most radical version is the thesis that there are no necessarily true propositions if an omnipotent God exists. That $1 + 2 = 3$ is true is as contingent upon God's omnipotent creative activity as is the proposition that grass is green. If we inject Leibniz's idiom of possible worlds into this version of the Cartesian principle, we can say that according to it, no proposition is true in every possible world. There are worlds God could have created in which $1 + 2 \neq 3$. Because this version of the Cartesian principle entails that every proposition is such that there is some possible world in which it is true and some possible world in which it is false, Alvin Plantinga has called this version *universal possibilism* (Plantinga 1980). A slightly more modest version of the Cartesian principle maintains that some propositions are necessarily true and exempt from God's unlimited power, although perhaps not the proposition that $1 + 2 = 3$. Obvious candidates are propositions that express necessary truths about God's existence and nature. This version of the Cartesian principle might maintain, for example, that God cannot fail to exist, to be omniscient, and to be omnipotent; that in every possible world it is true that God exists, is omniscient, and is omnipotent. Yet another version of the Cartesian principle maintains that although some propositions

are necessary, they are necessary because God conferred their necessity on them: no proposition is *necessarily* necessary. If no proposition is necessarily necessary, every proposition is possibly possibly true (and possibly possibly false). Plantinga has called this position *limited possibilism*. It can be understood in the following way. Suppose that not every world is possible relative to every other possible world. It might then be the case, for example, that although a proposition is true in every world possible relative to the actual world, there are still other worlds, not possible relative to the actual world but possible relative to some of the worlds that *are* possible relative to the actual world, in which the proposition is false. There are consistent systems of modal logic that allow for this sort of case. Perhaps the best way of interpreting limited possibilism is to connect its notion of possibility to conceivability. In making the proposition that $1 + 2 = 3$ necessary, God has made it, and us, such that we cannot conceive how it could be false. That is, in every world conceivable by us, " $1 + 2 = 3$ " is true. In some of the worlds conceivable by us in which " $1 + 2 = 3$ " is true, however, there are beings with conceptual capacities different from ours who can genuinely conceive " $1 + 2 = 3$ " to be false. It is important to stress that these beings' capacities are *genuine* capacities: it is not merely that they *think* that they can conceive 1 plus 2 not equaling 3; they can successfully comprehend what it would be like for 1 plus 2 not to equal 3. These beings thus have conceptual access to worlds in which " $1 + 2 = 3$ " is false. In this situation, then, although " $1 + 2 = 3$ " is necessarily true (true in every world conceptually accessible to us), it is not necessary that " $1 + 2 = 3$ " be necessarily true; that is, " $1 + 2 = 3$ " is not true in every world conceptually accessible to beings, conceivable by us, who have conceptual capacities that we cannot fully comprehend. (Philosophical literature on the relationship between possibility and conceivability is very rich. See Gendler and Hawthorne 2002.)

One may suspect that the Cartesian principle, which promotes divine omnipotence over necessary truth, is misguided. If the goal of the Cartesian principle is to present a conception of a God who can do or have done literally anything, then not only has that goal not been attained, but each of the three versions of the principle presents reasons for thinking that the goal is unattainable. If universal possibilism is correct, then there is one large class of things that God cannot do or have done; namely, make any truth to be a necessary truth. In particular, God cannot make it necessarily true that $1 + 2 = 3$ or that he exists or is omnipotent. If limited possibilism is true, then although God can establish some truths as necessary, he cannot make any truth to be necessarily necessary. On the analysis of limited possibilism that identifies possibility with relative conceivability, even if God cannot conceive of himself as not existing, God can conceive of

beings with conceptual capacities different from his who can genuinely conceive of him as not existing. These beings thus can do something that God cannot do.

Nor will it help to seek refuge in the position that exempts only some truths, including truths about God's existence and nature, from the class of truths that are contingent upon God. For this position sustains for a vast number of propositions the same criticism that applies to universal possibilism: try as he might, God cannot make or have made " $1 + 2 = 3$ " into a necessarily true proposition. Moreover, the position must provide an account of what it is that makes the exempt truths exempt. Simply to stake out truths about God's essence and existence is too ad hoc a procedure. But to the extent to which the position might allow for necessary truths about other kinds of entities—for example, sets or numbers—the position will approximate to common-sense intuitions about necessity but raise anew questions about the scope of God's omnipotence.

An alternative to the Cartesian principle is to attempt to explicate divine sovereignty over necessary truth by appealing not to God's omnipotence but rather to God's mental activity. Elements of this view can be found in the thought of Augustine and perhaps also in Leibniz. Although Leibniz's imagery includes the vision of God choosing from among the infinitely many different possible worlds which world would be actual, that is, which world God would create, the imagery does not require that possible worlds exist independently of God. One could maintain, as Leibniz comes close to maintaining, that possible worlds are merely conceptual entities residing in the divine mind. Centuries earlier, Augustine had identified the Platonic Forms—the abstract, perfect exemplars of concrete things and properties which concrete things and properties deficiently resemble—with *ideas* in the divine intellect. Augustine's doctrine and Leibniz's tendency can be viewed as examples of a theistic strategy that would make the existence of abstract objects depend on the divine mind. Let us call the strategy *the Augustinian strategy*, recognizing that instances of it, such as Leibniz's tendency, might never have been thought of by Augustine. If propositions are the bearers of truth and falsity and if propositions are themselves abstract objects, then on the Augustinian strategy, for a proposition to exist is just for it to be thought by God. (The strategy can be tailored to accommodate Thomas Aquinas' view that although normal human knowledge is propositional in content, God's knowledge is not. Aquinas believes that because propositions are complex objects and God's mode of knowing is simple both in its operation and in its representational content, God does not know by means of propositions. One can on Aquinas' behalf express more perspicuously the thesis that propositions exist only in the mind of God by maintaining that whatever it is that

provides the grounds for the existence of propositions in human knowledge exists in the mind of God.)

Although the Augustinian strategy accounts for the existence of propositions by lodging them or the entities on which they depend in God's mind, it does not account for the distinction between contingent and necessary propositions. Can one consistently maintain that although all propositions depend on God's activity for their existence, some propositions nevertheless cannot fail to be true (and some propositions cannot fail to be false), no matter what? It would appear that a positive answer to this question requires that the proposition that God exists itself be necessarily true. For if God could fail to exist, then, on the hypothesis that all propositions depend on God for their existence, God's nonexistence would be a circumstance under which propositions would also fail to exist. If one assumes that no proposition can be either true or false if it does not exist, then it follows that if God can fail to exist, no proposition can be necessarily true (or necessarily false); that is, no proposition can be true in every possible world (or false in every possible world). The Augustinian strategy applied to propositions thus seems to entail that if it is possible for God to fail to exist, then universal possibilism is true. (The converse also seems to hold: if universal possibilism is genuinely universal, then it applies to the proposition that God exists, entailing that there are possible worlds in which God does not exist.)

The Augustinian strategy must explain how it can be that there are truths that are genuinely necessary which depend, nonetheless, on God's mental activity for their necessity. Let us begin by asking how the strategy might depict the relationship between God and contingent propositions. As a result of creating the actual world, God acted in such a way that a number of propositions became true—for example, the proposition that the earth is the third planet from the sun—and a number of propositions became false—for example, the proposition that the moon has an atmosphere. We need not suppose that these propositions somehow existed before God's creative act made them true (or false). Nor need we suppose that the act of creation is simply or even primarily a matter of making propositions true. In particular, followers of Aquinas might want to say that the portrayal of creation as making certain propositions true is an artifice of human intellects, whose understanding is propositional in nature. Bearing these caveats in mind, we can continue by supposing that the strategy depicts God's creative activity with respect to the contingent features of the world as God's *choosing* which propositions would become true and which would become false. Choice, we may suppose, is an operation whose input is beliefs and desires and whose output is action. A proponent of the strategy will most likely want to make two observations, at a minimum, about divine beliefs and desires. First, God's beliefs cannot be

false or incomplete, and thus God's choices cannot suffer from the cognitive deficiencies of being erroneous or based on ignorance. Second, although it would be presumptuous to claim to know the exact content of God's desires in choosing to create, a defender of the Judeo-Christian tradition will insist that God's desires are directed toward the good. Leibniz is notorious for carrying the second observation to its logical extreme, arguing that since God is perfect, God would choose only the best; it follows that the actual world must be the best possible world. Other accounts of God's goodness have denied the assumption behind Leibniz's claim; namely, that perfect goodness entails maximization. But theistic dissent from Leibniz's view has not consisted in denial of the fundamental point that God's desires are desires for the good (see Kretzmann 1991; Mann 1991).

The Augustinian strategy can thus account for the truth and falsity of contingent propositions by making actual truth and actual falsity depend on God's creative choosing, a choosing that is cognitively perfect and directed toward the good. The strategy would thus maintain that a proposition, p , is contingent if and only if whether p is true or false depends on God's choice. But this thesis does not in itself show how the *contingency* of contingent propositions depends on God. Nor does the thesis in itself guarantee that the Augustinian strategy is independent of the Cartesian principle. Let us take the latter point first. It would help to show the independence of the Augustinian strategy from the Cartesian principle if one could show how God's freedom of choice grounds contingency without lapsing into universal possibilism or limited possibilism. One might begin by noting that the account of divine choice sketched above precludes some propositions from being possibly true, *if* propositions about God's existence and nature are necessarily true. Not only will the proposition that God does not exist be necessarily false, but so also will the proposition that God creates an irredeemably corrupt world. Many theists will not find these consequences unwelcome. One might continue by pointing out that God's being responsible for the contingency of contingent propositions need not be understood to entail that there is some proposition, p , that is in fact contingent but might have been necessary. Two of the consequences of standard interpretations of modal logic are that (1) any proposition that is possibly necessary is necessary and (2) any necessary proposition is necessarily necessary. The first consequence rules out universal possibilism. (Recall that universal possibilism asserts that no proposition, p , is necessarily true. If p is not necessarily true, then the contrapositive of (1) entails that it is not possible that p be necessarily true. But if that is so, then it follows by the interdefinability of possibility and necessity that it is necessary that p not be necessarily true, a result that establishes a necessary truth, contrary to universal possibilism.) The second consequence obviously rules out limited possibilism. The Augustinian

strategy can pay respect to standard modal logic by allowing that not even God could have promoted a contingent proposition into a necessary proposition. A defender of the Augustinian strategy can claim instead that the dependency of contingent propositions on God's activity can be illustrated by appeal to the asymmetry of explanation. An analogy may be helpful. Given Newtonian mechanics, one can deduce the period of a pendulum from the pendulum's length. Because the relevant mathematical operations are symmetrical, one can also deduce the pendulum's length from its period. It is obvious, however, that the pendulum's length explains its period, not vice versa. In similar fashion, a defender of the Augustinian strategy can claim that for any true contingent proposition, p , although " p is contingently true" and "God chooses that p be true and could have chosen that p be false" entail each other, it is the latter claim that explains the former, not vice versa.

Further articulation of the Augustinian strategy would require showing how this particular explanatory asymmetry is embedded in a general theistic theory of God and the world. But we have enough before us now to see how the Augustinian strategy might explicate the relation between God and necessary truth. We may suppose that every necessary truth is necessarily necessary and that just as God cannot have altered the status of a contingent proposition, so God cannot have altered the status of a necessary proposition. Because the necessary truths cannot vary across possible worlds, the Augustinian strategy cannot explicate their relation to God in terms of choice, if choice presupposes the ability to have chosen otherwise. Most theists would agree that if God is omniscient, then for any necessarily true proposition, p , " p is necessarily true" and "God knows that p is necessarily true" entail each other. The distinctive contribution of the Augustinian strategy is to insist that it is God's knowing that p is necessarily true that explains p 's being necessarily true rather than the other way around. It is not that God's intellectual activity *discovers* that $1 + 2 = 3$. But neither is it correct to say that God's activity *invents* the truth that $1 + 2 = 3$, if invention entails either that the truth came into existence at some time or that it might have been false. God thoroughly understands that $1 + 2 = 3$ with a sweep of intellectual comprehension that sees all the implications of that truth for all the rest of the truths. In understanding $1 + 2 = 3$ in this way, God understands something about himself as the supremely rational being. The necessary truths occupy an important place in the structure of rational thought. According to the Augustinian strategy, the structure of rational thought is either the structure of the divine mind or the divine mind itself, actively and essentially engaged in thinking.

One important class of necessary truths, according to the tradition informing the Augustinian strategy, is truths about God's nature. For example, God is necessarily or essentially omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good. Any

being who lacked one of these attributes or who possessed one of them only accidentally would not be God. (Defenders of the tradition typically insist that these sorts of attributes cannot be possessed accidentally.) If, in addition, God's existence is necessary, it follows that God cannot nullify his own existence or abrogate his essential attributes: God exists and is omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good in every possible world. On a theology based on the Cartesian principle, these consequences can appear to place limitations on the divine power and make God depend on his attributes for his being what he is. The Augustinian strategy can embrace the consequences while dispelling the appearance of limitation by deploying the following two tactics. One is to argue that, surface grammar to the contrary notwithstanding, propositions like "God cannot cause his own nonexistence" do not specify any real restriction on God's power. The other is to argue that, unlike created beings, the metaphysical distinction between a substance and its attributes does not apply to God. God is perfectly simple, in such a way that the expressions "God," "Perfect goodness," and "God's perfect goodness" do not refer to three things but rather to one thing specified in three ways. In this case, then, God does not *depend* on perfect goodness; God *is* perfect goodness itself.

Works Cited

- Adams, R. M. 1983. "Divine Necessity," *Journal of Philosophy* 80: 741–752.
- Curley, E. M. 1984. "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," *Philosophical Review* 93: 569–597.
- Frankfurt, H. 1977. "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," *Philosophical Review* 86: 36–57.
- Gendler, T. S., and J. Hawthorne, eds. 2002. *Conceivability and Possibility*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kretzmann, N. 1991. "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. S. MacDonald, 229–249. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Mann, W. E. 1991. "The Best of All Possible Worlds." In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. S. MacDonald, 250–277. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Reprinted as Chapter 11 of this volume.
- Mates, B. 1986. *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Plantinga, A. 1980. *Does God Have a Nature?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.

Modality, Morality, and God

Does God love what is right because it is right, or is what is right right because God loves it? Socrates' question, first asked in the *Euthyphro*, has received no completely satisfactory answer. It is, in fact, the beginning of an unpleasant dilemma for theists. For if a theist says that God loves right actions because they are right, then it seems to follow that they are right independently of God's loving them. Were he not to exist, right actions would still be right (and wrong actions would still be wrong). In that case the foundations of ethics do not lie in God but elsewhere. But if they lie elsewhere, why not eliminate the middleman and go directly to the source? On the other hand, if a theist says that right actions are right because God loves them, then it seems as though he believes that just anything that God loves is right, *in virtue solely of God's loving it*. Theists who grasp the first horn of the dilemma are fond of heaping abuse on those who choose the second. On the second alternative it is alleged to follow that if God were to love injustice, then his loving it would make the practice of injustice morally obligatory. That consequence is scarcely credible but no more incredible than the further assertion, also an integral part of the second alternative, that God's loving something is supposed to provide sufficient *moral* reason for our loving it. Defenders of the second horn are quick to repay the compliment. They accuse their opposite numbers of reducing God to the role of dispensable moral mouthpiece, at best a vade mecum in our quest for moral truth.

There is a position from which a theist can slip between the horns of the dilemma, preserving what should be preserved on both sides and discarding what should be discarded. It is useful to consider the dilemma in tandem with another theistic conundrum—whether God is the author of the necessary truths or whether they have their modal character independently of him. One might expect that a resolution of that conundrum will shed light on the *Euthyphro* dilemma.

I. A Suggestive False Start

In a paper which explores the *Euthyphro* dilemma with admirable clarity, Norman Kretzmann (1983) argues that it can be dissolved. Let us follow Kretzmann's way of expressing the dilemma. We are confronted with a choice between *theological objectivism* and *theological subjectivism*, expressed by the following two theses, respectively:

- (TO) God approves of right actions just because they are right and disapproves of wrong actions just because they are wrong.
 - (TS) Right actions are right just because God approves of them and wrong actions are wrong just because God disapproves of them.
- (Kretzmann 1983, 35)

It is Kretzmann's contention that the differences between (TO) and (TS) evaporate once we add an ingredient to them. That ingredient is perhaps the most notorious part of medieval theological speculation, the doctrine of divine simplicity. The doctrine maintains, in brief, that there is no complexity of any kind to be found in God. He has no physical parts, no temporal stages, and no properties distinct from himself. Kretzmann exploits the last feature. If God is good, then his goodness is not even metaphysically distinct from him: God is good because God is (identical with) goodness itself. When this doctrine is brought to bear on (TO) and (TS), it transforms them, according to Kretzmann, into the following theses:

- (TO') God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself approves of right actions just because they are right and disapproves of wrong actions just because they are wrong.
 - (TS') Right actions are right just because God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself approves of them and wrong actions are wrong just because God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself disapproves of them.
- (Kretzmann 1983, 45–46)

It is Kretzmann's contention that (TO') and (TS'), unlike (TO) and (TS), are "just two ways of saying the same thing" (Kretzmann 1983, 46). That is, once we acknowledge the doctrine of divine simplicity, the dispute between objectivist and subjectivist collapses. Where there is no difference there can be no dilemma.

The solution by dissolution is too good to be true. Why does Kretzmann think that (TO') and (TS') say the same thing? Because he is willing to trade in the locution "just because" for the locution "if and only if." If those locutions were interchangeable, then we could express (TO') and (TS') slightly differently, as, respectively:

- (TO*) God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself approves of right actions if and only if they are right and disapproves of wrong actions if and only if they are wrong.
- (TS*) Right actions are right if and only if God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself approves of them and wrong actions are wrong if and only if God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself disapproves of them.

We can interpret the "if and only ifs" in (TO*) and (TS*) as expressing ordinary truth-functional biconditionals, necessarily true biconditionals, or causal biconditionals. In all three cases the relation is arguably symmetric. "A if and only if B," modalized or not, says the same thing as "B if and only if A." In the case of the causal biconditional, "if and only if" is interpreted as "because and only because," and many philosophers have defended views which entail that "A is causally necessary and sufficient for B" is equivalent to "B is causally sufficient and necessary for A." On any of these three interpretations of "if and only if," (TO*) and (TS*) really do say the same thing, since on all three interpretations, "if and only if" is symmetric. How, then, can objectivist and subjectivist find anything to disagree about?

Answer: by insisting that none of the uses of the biconditional corresponds to the occurrences of "just because" in (TO') and (TS') and that those occurrences record genuine asymmetries. Surely some uses of "just because" are asymmetric. Consider the difference between "John got drunk just because he lost his job" and "John lost his job just because he got drunk." Each sentence is clearly unidirectional. We get closer to the function of "just because" in those sentences if we think of them as exemplifying a pattern in which "A just because B" is tantamount to "B explains A." Now explanation can be a stubbornly asymmetric phenomenon, even in cases of physically necessary co-occurrence and logically necessary equivalence. Given the length of a pendulum one can deduce its period from a simple law of motion. Given the period one can equally well deduce the length. But it is the length which explains why the pendulum has the period

it has, and not vice versa. Mathematical truths are all equally necessary, hence all equally entail all others, yet mathematicians rightly assume that some mathematical propositions explain why others are true. So even though (TO*) and (TS*) say the same thing, it does not follow that (TO') and (TS') do.

We can come to understand the differences between objectivist and subjectivist more fully by considering the reasons why each might be prepared to accept both (TO*) and (TS*) while maintaining that (TO') and (TS') are fundamentally different. Let us fabricate a specimen objectivist and a specimen subjectivist for inspection. Although fabricated, they are not, I trust, made of straw. Our objectivist and subjectivist are amicable in the following ways. They are both theists. They are also moral absolutists; they both assert that there are certain actions whose rightness or wrongness is invariant with respect to agent, circumstance, and time. Our subjectivist, in particular, is not a relativist. He believes that it is God's fiat that confers rightness and wrongness—that is his subjectivism—but it is God's fiat which also confers absoluteness. Our objectivist and subjectivist also agree in supposing that the biconditionals in (TO*) and (TS*) are necessarily true.

The catch is that they come to accept the biconditionals for quite different reasons. Suppose that actions displaying love of one's neighbor are right absolutely. Then (TO*) and (TS*) both yield the biconditional.

- (1) Neighborly love is right if and only if God approves of neighborly love.

The theological objectivist alleges that the truth of (1) is accounted for by God's perfect goodness and omniscience. Being omniscient, he cannot fail to know that neighborly love is right. Being perfectly good, he cannot fail to approve of neighborly love. But that neighborly love *is* right is something God has no control over: it is right independent of his say-so. The status of (1), according to the objectivist, is analogous to the status of "98 + 89 = 187 if and only if a properly and perpetually functioning calculator says that 98 + 89 = 187." We justifiably trust the calculator to give us the right answer, but it does not give the answer by *decree*; it *reports* the answer. The theological subjectivist, in contrast, claims that the truth of (1) is grounded in God's absolute *sovereignty*. God's approval of neighborly love is necessary for it to be right; were it not for his approval, neighborly love would not be right. Moreover, God's approving neighborly love is sufficient to make it right. Were that not so, then God would not be absolutely sovereign.

In assenting to (TO*) and (TS*), neither objectivist nor subjectivist has given up anything, and we should not infer from their identical head-nodding

behavior that the states of their souls are the same. The objectivist begins with the absolute rightness of neighborly love and conjoins that fact to certain facts about God's nature—that he is perfectly good and omniscient—to explain why God approves of neighborly love. The explanation flows only in one direction even though the biconditional, (1), flows in both. The subjectivist appeals to God's approving attitude towards neighborly love to explain why neighborly love is right: "*Fiat ius*" parallels "*Fiat lux*." It is an independent fact for the objectivist that neighborly love is right, a fact which God duly takes notice of and approves. For the subjectivist, the rightness of neighborly love depends on and is explained by God's approving it; it is God's approving neighborly love that is the independent fact. In general, then, the simplicist's (TO') and (TS') seem not to quell the dispute between objectivist and subjectivist. The dilemma remains.

II. The Modal Analogue

We are left with a deadlock between the autonomy of values and the sovereignty of God. There is a similar, well-known puzzle involving the relation between God and the necessary truths. Let us begin by supposing that there are necessary truths and falsehoods and that they differ in kind, not merely in degree, from contingent truths and falsehoods. Suppose further that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is an example of a necessary truth. What is the relation between that truth and God's creative activity?

Imagine two theists disagreeing about the correct answer. One I shall call a platonist, the other a cartesian; the labels are no guarantee of historical accuracy. The platonist propounds the following thesis about necessary truths and falsehoods:

- (TP) God affirms necessarily true propositions just because they are necessarily true and denies necessarily false propositions just because they are necessarily false.

The cartesian's thesis is this:

- (TC) Necessarily true propositions are necessarily true just because God affirms them and necessarily false propositions are necessarily false just because God denies them.

(It will help to forestall some misunderstanding if we interpret "affirms" as "affirms . . . in all possible worlds" and "denies" as "denies . . . in all possible

worlds.”) The realm of necessity, according to the platonist, is a preserve: not even God can poach on it. For the cartesian the preserve exists only by God’s decree: the privileged specimens in it owe their immunity to his sufferance. The cartesian accuses the platonist of curtailing God’s sovereignty. The platonist accuses the cartesian of unintelligibility: what sense can be assigned to the claim that God might have brought it about that $2 + 2 = 5$?

An ingenious philosopher might suggest that this Gordian knot is really a slip knot which pulls apart with an application of simplicity. For if God is omniscience itself, we can try reframing (TP) and (TC) as,

- (TP*) God conceived of as omniscience itself affirms necessarily true propositions if and only if they are necessarily true and denies necessarily false propositions if and only if they are necessarily false.
- (TC*) Necessarily true propositions are necessarily true if and only if God conceived of as omniscience itself affirms them and necessarily false propositions are necessarily false if and only if God conceived of as omniscience itself denies them.

The problem with (TP*) and (TC*) is identical to the problem with (TO*) and (TS*). Platonist and cartesian can agree to the identity of (TP*) and (TC*) and still claim that the venue of their quarrel is elsewhere. Consider the biconditional proposition,

- (2) $2 + 2 = 4$ if and only if God affirms that $2 + 2 = 4$,

yielded by (TP*) and by (TC*). The theological platonist asserts that the truth of (2) is explained by God’s being infallibly omniscient. Qua omniscient he knows all truths, including the truth that $2 + 2 = 4$. He also knows that “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is necessarily true, and in knowing that, he knows that he cannot do anything to falsify it. The notion of divine affirmation alluded to in (2) amounts to God’s knowing or infallibly believing. An infallible being does not believe false propositions. So if God affirms that $2 + 2 = 4$, we can be assured that $2 + 2 = 4$. We should note, however, that it is the necessity of “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” which determines part of the content of what God believes, not vice versa, according to the platonist. The theological cartesian, on the other hand, claims that it is God’s unimpedible affirming activity that establishes the necessity of $2 + 2 = 4$. “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” would not be necessarily true without God’s willing it to be so, and God’s willing it so is unimpedibly efficacious in bringing it about that “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” is necessarily true.

Although platonist and cartesian can accept (TP*) and (TC*), they have not thereby resolved their differences over (TP) and (TC). There is still

explanatory asymmetry. The cartesian accounts for logical necessity by appeal to God's affirming and denying activity. The platonist says that in the domain of necessity, what God affirms and denies is determined by the logical lay of the land. The platonist insists on the genuine necessity of the necessary truths (and falsehoods). The cartesian insists on the universal sovereignty of God. Those two claims alone are not obviously incompatible. Why, then, do platonist and cartesian assume contrary stances with respect to the priority of God versus necessity?

What concerns the platonist most is that necessary truths be unchangeable, unrevisable, inescapable. If " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is necessarily true, then not even an omnipotent God could have made it be that $2 + 2 = 5$, nor can he now alter the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$. There is no possible world in which $2 + 2 \neq 4$; a fortiori, there is no possible world which God could have created in which $2 + 2 \neq 4$. We can express the core of platonism initially by the following thesis:

- (P) For any proposition, P , if P is necessarily true, then it is not possible for any being, including God, to alter the truth value of P .

Recall that the cartesian, like the platonist, believes that there are necessary truths, truths which cannot possibly be false. The cartesian is thus not a *universal possibilist*, a person who believes that just any proposition could be or could have been false and thus that no truth is necessary.¹ Unlike the platonist, the cartesian believes that the necessary truths have their necessity conferred upon them by God. God is sovereign, and his sovereignty extends even to the logical structure of the world. The core of the cartesian's position is captured by this thesis:

- (C) If God is sovereign, then the necessary truths owe their necessity to God.

Let us supplement (P) and (C) with two further claims which we have presupposed:

- (3) God is sovereign.
(4) There are necessary truths.

The conjunction of (P), (C), (3), and (4) is not overtly contradictory. Yet the four of them together may strain our conceptual resources. How can it be

¹ The label of "universal possibilist" seems to have been coined in Plantinga 1980, 102. Frankfurt 1977 argues that Descartes was a universal possibilist. For another analysis of Descartes's views, see Curley 1984.

maintained that necessary truths owe their necessity to God *and* that nevertheless, he cannot revise or alter them?

A convenient way to begin grappling with these issues is to sort out two different questions.

- (5) Could God have brought it about that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " be false?
- (6) Could God have brought it about that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " be contingent?

A "yes" answer to (5), generalized, commits you to universal possibilism, the view that there are no necessary truths. A "no" answer to (5) coupled with a "yes" answer to (6), generalized, gives you *limited possibilism*. Limited possibilism recognizes the existence of necessary propositions but hastens to add that no proposition is necessarily necessary. Put another way, limited possibilism maintains that any necessary proposition is such that it is possible that it not be necessary. So a theist who is willing to accept limited possibilism can say that although not even God can bring it about that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " be false, he can bring it about that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " be contingent.²

A limited possibilist has no problem with our platonist's (P), because (P) only says that God cannot alter the truth value of a necessarily true proposition. Let us consider a different platonistic principle which the limited possibilist cannot tolerate:

- (P') For any proposition, *P*, if *P* is necessarily true, then it is not possible for any being, including God, to alter *P*'s status as necessary.

According to (P'), God cannot make a necessarily true proposition into a contingently true (or false) proposition. We might think of (P') as part of a more general thesis to the effect that God cannot change the modal status of any proposition.

In any event, the position we are examining answers "no" to both questions (5) and (6); it is committed to neither variety of possibilism. God cannot have altered the truth or the necessity of any necessarily true proposition. The position thus certainly pays respects to the core of platonism. How well does it comport with cartesianism?

The cartesian insists that the necessary truths owe their status to God. God's creative activity establishes the necessary truths; in fact, the cartesian does not shrink from saying that God *wills* that the necessary truths be what they are. But we have just agreed that God could not have willed them otherwise. Now this may suggest that the use of the term "will" here is facetious. If Canute "commands" the

² For discussion of limited possibilism, see Plantinga 1980, 103–109; Curley 1984, 589–592.

waves to keep on rolling, and they do, it is asinine for Canute to claim success. It is tempting to think that all genuine cases of willing must involve the agent's ability to bring about the opposite outcome or allow the opposite outcome to occur. This intuition lies behind the traditional notion of freedom as liberty of indifference, which for present purposes we can characterize in the following way: agent *A* is free with respect to situation *S* if and only if *A* is able to bring about *S* and *A* is able to bring about not-*S*. If freedom requires liberty of indifference, then God is not free with respect to the situation that $2 + 2 = 4$ be necessary, since he cannot bring it about that $2 + 2 = 4$ not be necessary.

There are at least two different lines of response which can be taken. First, one could deny the universal applicability of liberty of indifference, restricting it, say, to contingent situations. One could then claim that God freely wills that $2 + 2 = 4$ be necessary while admitting that he does not have it in his power to will the opposite. Whatever merit the response may have, it does not appear to be helpful in the present context. For it does not explain what is efficacious or even distinctive about God's willing that $2 + 2 = 4$ be necessary, as opposed to Canute's willing that $2 + 2 = 4$ be necessary.

The second line of response is to maintain the universal applicability of liberty of indifference, to maintain further that God wills that $2 + 2 = 4$ be necessary, and to conclude that his so willing is not free. But, one might hasten to add, neither is his willing feckless. God's willing that $2 + 2 = 4$ be necessary is what is responsible for the necessity of $2 + 2 = 4$, even though God sees that he cannot have willed it otherwise.

The doctrine of divine simplicity, which Kretzmann invoked with respect to the *Euthyphro* dilemma, can illuminate the present issues by suggesting a diagnosis of where platonism and cartesianism go wrong. The problem is not with the core principles [(P), (P'), and (C)], but rather with the ways in which platonist and cartesian deploy the principles in articulating their positions.

Return to proposition (2). The platonist accepts (2) as long as he can construe the notion of affirmation contained in it as an *epistemic* notion. We do no injustice to his position if we say that he interprets (2) as

(2P) $2 + 2 = 4$ if and only if God believes that $2 + 2 = 4$.

The cartesian, on the contrary, construes God's affirmation as *volitional*, and reads (2) as

(2C) $2 + 2 = 4$ if and only if God wills that $2 + 2 = 4$.

The content of the platonist's position is not exhausted by (2P). What further animates the platonist is a vision of what knowledge—including God's

knowledge—is like. According to that vision, for each agent who is capable of having beliefs, there are some beliefs which, if they are true, are true whether the agent believes them or not. For the platonist every epistemic agent has some beliefs whose truth depends on the way the world is. The platonist's vision amounts to common sense in the case of humans. My believing that P , for many (all?) values of $\{P\}$, is not the same as my knowing that P . I can believe that $789^2 = 622,251$ and be mistaken. Even if I correctly believe that $789^2 = 622,521$, the correctness of my belief does not issue from the belief itself. In this and many other cases, facts must cooperate in order for my believing to be counted as knowing.

The platonist might allow that God's epistemic agency is different from that of humans in two important respects. First, he might allow that all God's beliefs are "nondiscursive," that is, that all God's beliefs are immediate and noninferential and that whatever God's belief-acquisition mechanisms are, they are infallible. Second, the platonist could agree that God's knowledge of contingent truths somehow does not depend on anything other than God's believing contingent truths. (See Mann 1985.) Where he digs in his heels is on the matter of necessary truths. God may believe them nondiscursively. Nevertheless, God's belief just is not knowledge unless " $789^2 = 622,521$ " is true, and he depends on its truth in order for his believing it to count as his knowing it.

There are two implications of the doctrine of divine simplicity which are germane here. The first is the identity of God's believing with God's knowing. The second is the identity of God's knowing (= God's believing) with God's willing. The divine activity which is God's believing that P just is the divine activity which is God's willing that P . It is not as if there were two separate faculties in God, an epistemic faculty and a volitional faculty. It is rather that there is one divine activity, which in some respects from our point of view is more aptly called his believing or knowing and in other respects more aptly called his willing.

If God's believing and God's willing are identical, then the difference between (2P) and (2C) evaporates: (2P) and (2C) no longer offer any purchase for disagreement between platonist and cartesian. Moreover, the doctrine of divine simplicity allows us to diagnose quite clearly how the dispute between platonist and cartesian arises. The platonist concentrates overly much on those aspects of God's activity which we characterize as his knowing the necessary truths and finds it hard to resist the conclusion that the necessary truths must antecedently *be there* in order to be known by God. The platonist thus overlooks the possibility that God's knowledge is pure activity, literally responsible for all that it knows, passively conditioned by nothing. The cartesian, on the other hand, in characterizing the relation between God and

the necessary truths exclusively in terms of the former's willing the latter, overcompensates for the error made by the platonist. The cartesian is thus encouraged to think that since God wills the necessary truths, he could have willed them otherwise. With that stroke of the brush, the cartesian paints himself into one or the other corners of possibilism. The cartesian neglects to consider the possibility that God genuinely wills some things which he could not have willed otherwise. On the view we have been canvassing, platonism and cartesianism are overextensions of paradigms of knowledge and volition which apply most happily to the human situation, not the divine. The doctrine of divine simplicity forces us to see that although there is nothing wrong with our speaking of God's knowing and God's willing, we should not regard these as two really separate activities. The doctrine thus clears the way for the view developed here.

To sum up: God brings it about that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is necessarily true insofar as he wills it to be so and insofar as his will is unimpedible. But his willing that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " be necessarily true is his knowing that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is necessarily true, and in knowing that fact, God knows that he cannot have known that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is not necessarily true. That is, he knows that he cannot have willed that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " not be necessarily true.

The doctrine of divine simplicity is philosophically controversial and shall remain undefended in this paper. Much of the position I have sketched would survive its excision, since its primary function has been diagnostic rather than constitutive. There are, in any case, other critical questions which should be asked of the position.

First, in denying limited possibilism we have accepted the position that every necessary proposition is necessarily necessary. We could think of this as part of a general thesis about modal unrevisability, the other part being the claim that every contingent proposition is necessarily contingent. Standard modal-logical treatments of logical necessity subscribe to both parts of the thesis. Given the minimum modal system, T, $\{Lp \rightarrow LLp\}$ is the characteristic axiom of S4, and $\{Mp \rightarrow LMp\}$ is the characteristic axiom of S5 (which includes S4). S5 is almost everybody's favorite system for codifying alethic modal logic. But why should it be that no proposition can vary in its modal status? A theist who accepts the view developed here has a ready answer to the question—because God so arranged it. God's creative activity is responsible for the first-order modal status of propositions *and* the second-order unrevisability of the first-order modal status.

The second question falls fast on the heels of the first. With respect to the necessary propositions, God cannot have willed them otherwise. Why is this so? It will not do to say—because the propositions are necessary. The view put forward here explains logical necessity in terms of God's activity. It cannot

perform a volte-face and explain the constraint on God's activity as due to logical necessity. But then why is God's activity so constrained?

God's will is and must be perfectly rational: as the doctrine of divine simplicity would remind us, his will is his wisdom. God thus operates under the "constraint" of rational necessity. Nothing he does can be rationally suboptimal. We can think of the necessary truths not as templates according to which even God must channel his activities in the act of creation but rather as a part of the creative expression of this perfectly rational will. It is important to note that on this view it is not as if we could use the necessary truths to determine whether God is perfectly rational. The necessary truths just are (part of) the expression of God's perfectly rational mental activity: they have no status independent of that activity. The view sketched here has some similarities to *constructivism* in the philosophy of mathematics. Constructivists characterize mathematical truths as just those truths which would be produced by ideal, creative mathematicians. In similar fashion, the present view maintains that the necessary truths are the product of an Ideally Rational Agent. One problem for constructivism as a program in the philosophy of mathematics is to specify in some noncircular way just who the ideally creative mathematicians might be. For the theist willing to accept the present view that is not a problem.

III. The Moral Analogy

There are deep connections between the cases of modality and morality. Let us use the term "moral values" to apply to good-making features, right-making features, and the things, events, actions, principles, intentions, motives, character traits, and the like which display these features. We can retrieve (3),

- (3) God is sovereign,

and add to it

- (7) Some moral values are absolute.

We can put forward a thesis on behalf of the subjectivist which is analogous to the cartesian's core principle, (C):

- (S) If God is sovereign, then the absolute moral values owe their absoluteness to God.

It will be helpful to tailor much of the rest of our discussion around a series of criticisms which objectivists make about subjectivist theories. There are at least four strands in the objectivist's warp, some or all of which he deems to be lacking from the subjectivist's woof.

First, the objectivist insists that the fact that some moral values are absolute implies that they are not subject to exception, amendment, or rescission. In particular, they are immune even from God's revisionary activity. Second, in order for absolute moral values to be worthy of the name, God must be subject to them. There is no double standard. If murder is wrong absolutely, then it is wrong for God along with the rest of us. It may be inappropriate to say that God has the virtue of courage, but it is not inappropriate to expect God to act as the courageous person would act. One can take the objectivist's second point to be a corollary of the first. The objectivist can grant that God's ontological status is different from ours and still claim that with respect to this point the ontological difference makes no moral difference.

The third point is an epistemological one. What many objectivists find repugnant about subjectivism is the idea that if morality depends entirely on God's will, then the only way we could have knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong, is by knowing what God wills. It appears that the only way we could obtain such knowledge is by revelation or religious authority. In either case subjectivism seems to make no significant room for the free and autonomous use of human reason as a source of moral knowledge. The fourth point concerns motivation. The desire to pursue certain values and to shape one's life according to them should come from the values themselves and not from extrinsic considerations, such as what it would be in one's self-interest to do or become. Subjectivism encourages the attitude that we should behave in certain ways solely in order to gain favor in the eyes of God. (See Kretzmann 1983.)

The position concedes the first two points to the objectivist. In doing so it subscribes to the following two principles:

- (O) If some moral values are absolute, then it is not possible for any being, including God, to institute an alternative set of absolute values, to make legitimate exceptions to them, to revise them, or to rescind them.
- (O') If some moral values are absolute, then it is wrong for any being, including God, to act in a way contrary to them.

Thus the position subscribes to (3), (7), (S), (O), and (O'); we can now epitomize it. Some values, perhaps neighborly love and a proscription against murder, are absolute (7). That entails that not even God can alter them (O). In

this respect the absolute moral values are analogous to the necessary truths. Insofar as they are absolute, moral values apply even to God (O'). In spite of these facts the absolute moral values owe their special character to God [(3) and (S)]; in this respect the position agrees with subjectivism. The position will go on to deny the excesses of certain kinds of objectivism and subjectivism. The objectivist errs if he thinks that God could only be a moral educator and not a moral legislator. The error is abetted, perhaps, by the objectivist's construing God's approval of neighborly love in contexts like (1) as a sort of passive, epistemic acclamation. The subjectivist errs if he thinks that God could have willed just any set of values, or at least some alternative set of values, to be absolute. That error would lead, one supposes, to *permissibilism* of some stripe or other. The doctrine of divine simplicity can be used once again to diagnose the excesses.

(7), (O), and (O') entail that God cannot alter the absolute moral values and that it would be wrong for him to act in violation of them. There is no inconsistency here, nor any exception to the principle that "ought" implies "can," but many philosophers might find (O') troubling. Encouraged by (S) they might come to think that it is wrong *for us* to commit murder, for example, because God has so decreed it, and we are duty-bound to him. But how can murder be wrong *for God*? It is not obviously coherent to suppose that God has a duty to himself not to murder (see Adams 1973, 339) or that he addresses commands to himself not to murder (see Quinn 1978, 131). Whence the source of wrongness for God?

Let us suppose, *arguendo*, that the notions of imposing a duty on oneself and issuing a command to oneself are highly suspicious. Even so, the notion of willing oneself to do or to refrain from doing something is not. We can think of God ruling out some actions he might perform, not because they violate a duty he has to himself or a command he has issued to himself, but because they are incompatible with his being a morally perfect being. Part of the content of the concept of a morally perfect being is given by the absolute moral values, for which, remember, God is responsible. Consider the following analogy. Some people—saints and heroes, for example—may view themselves as "bound" by standards of behavior more demanding than those to which the rest of us conform. From our point of view such people perform supererogatory deeds. They may sincerely and (given their ideals) accurately perceive themselves as doing nothing more than what is required by their image of what they would ideally like to be. Such persons could agree that many of their actions are not required by any duties they have. Nevertheless, they may still think that it would be wrong, in the sense that they would not be living up to their freely self-imposed standards, for them not to perform the supererogatory deeds.

We can think of God as the perfectionist par excellence. He does not *strive* to live the ideal moral life; he *lives* it; about which he cannot be cognitively in error and for which his action is the expression of a free, rational, and loving will. In living this life he sees with perfect clarity that many things he is not duty-bound to do are nevertheless incompatible with his living the life of the morally perfect being. The picture briefly limned here is consistent with God's having no duties at all.³ Thus (O') may split into two principles, reflecting two different notions of wrongness:

- (O'1) If some moral values are absolute, then for any being other than God, that being violates a duty to God if that being acts in a way contrary to any of these values.
- (O'2) If some moral values are absolute, then God would not be living the life of moral perfection if he were to act in a way contrary to any of those values.

And so, in a way not objectionable to objectivists, there is a double standard between God and other persons.

Although we have acquiesced to the objectivist's first two points, we ought to be more belligerent about the third. The worry about the autonomy of moral knowledge may pertain to some versions of subjectivism, but it does not apply to the position we are considering. The objection depends on a premise to this effect:

- (8) If absolute moral values owe their absoluteness to God's will, then the only way that we could know about them is by knowing what God wills.

(8) contains an ambiguity, however, centering on the phrase "knowing what God wills." The third objection is fueled by one's interpreting (8) as

- (8') If absolute moral values owe their absoluteness to God's will, then the only way that we could know about them is by knowing that God wills them to be so.

But we need not accept (8') in accepting (8). (8) can also be read as

- (8*) If absolute moral values owe their absoluteness to God's will, then the only way we could know about them is by knowing something which is equivalent to part of the content of God's will.

³ For quite different reasons, Morris 1984 argues for the thesis that God literally has no duties but acts in many cases according to duty.

(8*) allows one to realize that neighborly love is right without having privileged access to God's will. One might come to see that neighborly love is entailed by the dictates of pure practical reason. Some theists may wish to credit the reliability of that procedure to God's grace, but the point is that even so, we do not need to know the latter item in order to know the former. (8*) allows, then, for a diversity of mechanisms for acquiring moral knowledge, including the use of human reason, while (8') apparently does not.

The objectivist's fourth point is a legitimate concern about moral motivation. Crude versions of subjectivism give one no better reason to conform to the values validated by God's will than considerations of saving one's hide. There are three points to be made about the present position. First, the position maintains that at least some of the values that God validates are absolute. They are such that although God creates and sustains them, God, a being with a perfectly rational will, cannot have willed them otherwise. They are the expression of a rationally optimal will, and they would thus seem to have at least a *prima facie* claim to our assent insofar as we are rational agents. Second, the position suggests that God's life, the life of supreme moral perfection, is a life lived in conformity with the absolute moral values, not because God is duty-bound with regard to them, but rather because living a life in conformity with them is partly or wholly constitutive of living the life of moral perfection. The position can maintain, not that we should strive, in vain, to live the life that God lives, but that to the extent to which we are moved by our (imperfect) vision of that perfect life, we should want to emulate it in the ways that are available to us. One way is to conform our behavior and attitudes to the absolute moral values. Third, the position does not preclude one's being motivated by a sense of duty to God. For example, one might claim that we are related to God in relevant respects as children are to their parents and that that relation creates duties akin to filial obligations. So the position has ample resources to provide a respectable theory of moral motivation.

Are the views I have sketched here on the good and the true too good to be true? They need to be elaborated and investigated further. For example, in locating modality and morality within the purview of God's sovereignty, I have insisted that God is not free to will otherwise with respect to the necessary truths or absolute values. But what kind of sovereignty does one have in a realm if one's decrees can never alter anything in that realm? The proper answer, I believe, lies in pointing out that the alleged constraint on God's freedom is God's own rational will. A full defense of this answer would maintain that God's freedom in this realm is his rational autonomy and that the necessary truths and absolute values are the expression of that rational autonomy. (For further discussion of problems connected with God's freedom, see Mann 1988.) Although not even God enjoys freedom as liberty of indifference

vis-à-vis the necessary truths and absolute values, he does exercise freedom as creative, rational autonomy with respect to bringing them about. Thus in discovering that $98 + 89 = 187$ or that harming others—even in return for harm done to us—is wrong, we discover parts of the content of a supremely rational will. It goes without saying that more work needs to be done here. The payoff for theists, however, is potentially high. If these views are defensible, they provide a way of understanding how God can be the *source* of truth and value, not merely an admirer. And if it should turn out that the views are too good to be true, that at least would be a better fate than their being too bad to be believed.⁴

Works Cited

- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1973. "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness." In *Religion and Morality: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr., 318–347. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Curley, E. M. 1984. "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths." *Philosophical Review* 93: 569–597.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 1977. "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths." *Philosophical Review* 86: 36–57.
- Kretzmann, Norman. 1983. "Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality." In *Hamartia: The Concept of Error in the Western Tradition*, ed. Donald V. Stump et al., 27–50. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Mann, William E. 1985. "Epistemology Supernaturalized." *Faith and Philosophy* 2: 436–456. Reprinted as Chapter 5 of this volume.
- Mann, William E. 1988. "God's Freedom, Human Freedom, and God's Responsibility for Sin." In *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, 182–210. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Reprinted as Chapter 10 of this volume.
- Morris, Thomas V. 1984. "Duty and Divine Goodness." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21: 261–268.
- Plantinga, Alvin. 1980. *Does God Have a Nature?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1978. *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁴ I wish to thank Hilary Kornblith, Norman Kretzmann, Derk Pereboom, Philip L. Quinn, and Eleonore Stump for comments and encouragement on earlier drafts of this chapter. I read a version as an invited paper at the American Philosophical Association's Eastern Division meeting in 1985 and benefited from comments by Thomas V. Morris. Support for writing this paper was provided by a Summer Research Grant for 1985 from the University of Vermont, which is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

God's Freedom, Human Freedom, and God's Responsibility for Sin

God is the cause of every event that takes place in the world, just as he is the creator of the whole universe as it now exists.

—Moses Maimonides

The God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is a personal being, to whom various kinds of cognitive and volitional activities are correctly ascribed. He is said to be supremely knowledgeable, powerful, and loving and to work his ways intentionally in the affairs of humans. He is also thought to be supremely free, free of many of the constraints to which humans are subject. He freely created the world, could have chosen to create a different world or not to create at all; he freely responds or refrains from responding to his creatures; he freely offers his divine grace for our salvation. The traditional theological position—more often presupposed than articulated—is that God is maximally free, as free as any being possibly could be.

What is it for God to be free? The conceptions of freedom with which we are most familiar are intended to apply to humans. It might be that any attempt to transfer these conceptions wholesale to the case of God requires modification, if not abandonment. Consider the case of knowledgeability. Tied intimately to the notion of knowledgeability in humans are such operations as learning, memory storage and retrieval, and inference. Yet there is a powerful case to be made that knowledgeability in God involves none of these operations.¹ It is still correct to say that God is knowledgeable, but knowledgeability may be realized in God in a way quite different from the way(s) in which it is realized in humans.

I wish to discuss three general theories about human freedom. Each has had its philosophical champions. I shall argue that a certain set of traditional theological assumptions entails that freedom is realized in God in a way significantly

¹ See, for example, William E. Mann, "Epistemology Supernaturalized," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 436–456. Reprinted as Chapter 5 of this volume.

different from the way in which it is realized in humans. The difference seems to pose a threat to human freedom and to imply that God is morally culpable for human sin. Rather than abandon the set of theological assumptions, I shall argue that the alleged consequences do not follow from it.

I. What Means This Freedom?

The classic debate about human freedom and its compatibility or incompatibility with determinism has produced two general, competing theories about what it is for a person to be free.² Using the traditional terminology, we can distinguish between *liberty of indifference* and *liberty of spontaneity*.

Let us characterize liberty of indifference in this fashion:

- (LI) Agent *A* is free at time *t* with respect to situation *s* if and only if *A* has it in his power at *t* to bring it about that *s* and *A* has it in his power at *t* to refrain from bringing it about that *s*.

The crucial, undefined notion in this characterization is the notion of an agent's having something in his power. The intuitive idea behind the notion is that if *A* is free with respect to *s*, then it is up to *A* whether *A* brings about *s* or not. In particular, the causal history of the world up to time *t* is indecisive with respect to *A*'s bringing about *s* or not. An exhaustive list of all the causal laws governing the world, conjoined with an exhaustive list of all the situations that obtain or have obtained in the past (relative to *t*), entails neither that *A* brings about *s* nor that *A* brings about not-*s*.³ We can presume the list to include all the facts about *A*'s psychological states: there is nothing about *A*'s character, beliefs, desires, and the like that, when conjoined with relevant laws of human behavior (if there are any), implies that *A* will choose *s* over not-*s* or vice versa.

It is not accidental that the conception of freedom as liberty of indifference has been championed by libertarians, those philosophers who are incompatibilists

² A useful discussion of these two theories, or families of theories, is contained in various writings of Anthony Kenny: "Descartes on the Will," in *Cartesian Studies*, ed. R. J. Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp. 1–31, esp. sect. 2; "Freedom, Spontaneity and Indifference," in *Essays on Freedom of Action*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 87–104; and *Will, Freedom and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), esp. pp. 122–161.

³ There are some problems here involving "future-infected" situations that obtain before *t*. If *t* is 1987 and if in 1986 the situation, *A*'s bringing about *s* a year hence, obtained, then the past history of the world up to *t* is not indecisive with respect to *A*'s bringing about *s*. We should understand the notion of freedom as liberty of indifference as having a device to expunge such situations from the causal history of the world up to *t*. See Alfred J. Freddoso, "Accidental Necessity and Logical Determinism," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), 257–278.

and who believe that persons are free. If freedom requires the absence of determination by causal laws, then (LI) gives the libertarian enough leverage to express his case. Of course we may wonder whether anyone really is free according to this conception of freedom. We may even ask whether anyone would want to be free in this way. The debate will have just begun. I shall not pursue it further at this point. We should note, however, one feature of (LI) that seems plausible and that will receive further attention. If *A* is free at *t* with respect to *s* and if at *t* *A* refrains from bringing it about that *s*, it still might be that *s* obtains at or after *t* without *A*'s agency. *A*'s refraining at *t* from bringing it about that *s* typically does not preclude *B*'s bringing it about at *t* that *s*. Smith can turn off the water tap or leave it on. At *t* Smith refrains from turning it off. At *t* Jones, under no relevant causal influence of Smith, turns off the water tap. So although Smith refrains at *t* from bringing it about that the water tap is off, nevertheless at *t* the water tap is off. Smith's freedom, construed as liberty of indifference, is in no way compromised by this sort of situation. We may say in a case like this that if *A* is free à la (LI) with respect to *s*, then *A* is *decisive about A's not bringing it about that s* but that *A* is not *decisive about whether s obtains*.

As an approximation to the notion of freedom as liberty of spontaneity, let us say the following:

- (LS) *A* is free at *t* with respect to *s* if and only if either *A* brings it about at *t* that *s* because *A* wants at *t* to bring it about that *s*. or *A* refrains from bringing it about at *t* that *s* because *A* wants at *t* to refrain from bringing it about that *s*.⁴

Compatibilists, those philosophers who are determinists and who believe that persons are (sometimes) free, are attracted to some variation of (LS), because it allows (i) that a person's wants are themselves causes; (ii) that wants are themselves caused; and (iii) that to be free is simply for there to be some sort of harmony between one's wants and one's actions. In contrast to libertarians, compatibilists can insist that the causal history of the world before *t* either implies that *A* brings it about that *s* or implies that *A* does not bring it about that *s*. *A* freely brings it about that *s* if and only if *A*'s desire to bring it about that *s* is the proximate causal vehicle that delivers *A*'s bringing it about that *s*. *A* freely refrains from bringing it about that *s* if and only if *A*'s desire not to bring

⁴ (LS) has the consequence of judging an agent to be unfree with respect to any of his actions that he desires neither to do nor to refrain from doing. This result is counterintuitive. It is at least as implausible to say that an agent is free with respect to *all* such actions. The problem would be to figure out a way of making discriminations within this class of cases without abandoning the appeal to desires. Nothing in this essay hinges on our pursuing these issues further.

it about that *s* is causally sufficient for *A*'s not bringing it about that *s*. In the latter case it could still be that *s* obtains. Smith desires at *t* not to turn off the water tap; his desire brings it about that he refrains at *t* from turning off the water tap. Smith thus freely refrains at *t* from turning off the water tap even though Jones turns off the water tap at *t*. Can we then say in a case like this, as we did when examining (LI), that *A* is decisive about *A*'s not bringing it about that *s* but that *A* is not decisive about whether *s* obtains?

A wily compatibilist will say that we can. It is clearly true that *A* is not decisive about whether *s* obtains: the water tap is off even though Smith refrained from turning it off. The compatibilist will urge that it is also true that *A* is decisive about *A*'s not bringing it about that *s*. Smith's desire was to refrain from turning off the water tap, and that desire was effective in preventing Smith from turning off the water tap. That is all that is needed. In general, for *A* to be decisive about *A*'s not bringing it about that *s* just is for *A*'s desires to be effective in bringing it about that *A* refrains from bringing it about that *s*. The compatibilist's notion of decisiveness is a different notion from that of the libertarian's, but that is to be expected, since the notions of liberty of indifference and liberty of spontaneity are themselves different.

Foes of compatibilism have argued that (LS) gives us a deceitful account of human freedom, because in telling us that we are free if our actions are in conformity with our desires, it neglects to address the issue whether we are free with respect to the desires we have. Our desires in turn are the products of causal processes that were initiated long before we were born, if determinism is true, and so it is alleged to follow that we cannot help but have the desires we have.⁵ More sophisticated versions of (LS) have attempted to rebut this criticism, either by introducing higher-order desires or by distinguishing causal pedigrees of the desires we have or both.⁶ It would take us too far afield to pursue this debate further. Instead, I wish to focus on a third theory of human freedom that straddles liberty of indifference and liberty of spontaneity.

Libertarian defenders of freedom as (LI) seek to locate human freedom in the interstices of the natural network of event causation. To be free, a

⁵ For a sustained discussion and defense of arguments of this type, see Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

⁶ See Gerald Dworkin, "Acting Freely," *Notus* 4 (1970), 367–383; Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971), 5–20 (reprinted in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982], pp. 81–95); Wright Neely, "Freedom and Desire," *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), 32–54; Gary Watson, "Free Agency," *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975), 205–220 (reprinted in *Free Will*, ed. Watson, pp. 96–110); and Gerald Dworkin, "Autonomy and Behavior Control," *Hastings Center Report* 6 (1976), 23–28. Watson's anthology contains a useful bibliography.

person's action must issue from an act of that person's will, where it is understood that the act of will either is uncaused or has the agent as its cause. (In the latter case it is alleged that agent causation is different in kind from event causation.) Compatibilist defenders of freedom as (LS) locate human freedom in the harmony between a person's desires and actions, even if more sophisticated versions find need to augment the harmony. The third type of theory connects freedom with reason. A person's actions are free insofar as they are the expression of that person's rational decisions. Elements of this conception of freedom are to be found in the writings of the great Rationalist philosophers, including Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel. There are significant differences among them as to what constitutes the permissible input of considerations if a decision is to be counted as genuinely rational, differences that are reflected in the notions of viewing things *sub specie durationis* as opposed to *sub specie aeternitatis*, heteronomy versus autonomy of the will, *Willkür* informed by *Wille*, *Moralität* as opposed to *Sittlichkeit*.⁷ We can safely ignore those differences and concentrate instead on a generic characterization of what freedom is, according to this loosely affiliated tradition.

Consider the following principle:

- (RO) *A* is free at *t* with respect to situation *s* if and only if either (i) *A* chooses at *t* that *s* because *A* realizes at *t* that *s* is rationally preferable to not-*s*; or (ii) *A* chooses at *t* that not-*s* because *A* realizes at *t* that not-*s* is rationally preferable to *s*; or (iii) *A* chooses arbitrarily at *t* that *s* or *A* chooses arbitrarily at *t* that not-*s* because *A* realizes at *t* that *s* is not rationally preferable to not-*s* and that not-*s* is not rationally preferable to *s*.

⁷ On Spinoza, see the *Ethics*, bks. 4 and 5, esp. bk. 4, propositions 62–66; Stuart Hampshire, "Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 46 (1960), 195–215; and Stuart Hampshire, "Spinoza's Theory of Human Freedom," *The Monist* 55 (1971), 554–566.

On Kant, see the *Critique of Pure Reason*, esp. the Third Antinomy (A444/B472–A451/B479, A532/B560–A558/B586); the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, esp. chap. 3; the *Critique of Practical Reason*, esp. pt. 1, bk. 1, chap. 1; Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), esp. chap. 11; Ralf Meerbote, "Kant on the Nondeterminate Character of Human Actions," in *Kant on Causality, Freedom, and Objectivity*, ed. William L. Harper and Ralf Meerbote (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 138–163; and the essays by Terence Irwin, Ralf Meerbote, Allen W. Wood, and Jonathan Bennett in *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Allen W. Wood (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 31–112.

On Hegel, see the *Philosophy of Right*, esp. sects. 4–28, 142–157; and Richard L. Schacht, "Hegel on Freedom," in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), pp. 289–328.

No philosopher has enunciated precisely this characterization of freedom. There are several different ways in which it could be modified and amplified, yielding a family of conceptions of freedom as involving rationality. We may call (RO) and its cognates *liberty of rational optimality*. Our understanding of liberty of rational optimality will be deepened by examining several features of (RO) in detail.

A full-fledged theory about agent freedom built around (RO) would incorporate a theory of rational preference and an axiology; that is, a theory about what sorts of things have intrinsic value and hence are worthy of our rational choice. There can be vigorous disagreement in both areas of theorizing. It is fortunate that nothing in this essay depends on fleshing out the notion of rational preferability.

It is a fine question whether (RO) is compatible with determinism. Any attempt to answer that question would have to deal with such issues as whether reasons are causes. And so it would seem that some versions of (RO) might be compatible with determinism and that other versions might not be. Once again, none of our present concerns depend on our giving a determinate answer to the question.

There are cases in which *A* rationally chooses that *s* but is unable to bring it about that *s*. A defender of (RO) must be prepared to say that so long as *A*'s choice is rationally optimal, *A* is free, even if *A* cannot effectuate the choice. There are some important issues here concerning the extent of such cases. A defender of (RO) will want to limit the scope of such cases by invoking the notion of rationality itself. It is natural to suppose, for example, that no one can rationally choose a situation that is logically impossible and that no one can rationally choose a situation that intrinsically requires that that person do something that he knows he cannot do. Nevertheless, we expect there to be a residuum of cases in which an agent freely chooses a rational outcome and in which the agent cannot bring about the outcome. It is incumbent on a defender of (RO) to spell out the principles that cover those sorts of cases.

The conception of freedom delineated by (RO) makes an agent's freedom *relative* with respect to the agent's reasons while at the same time the agent's freedom is *objective* with respect to the agent's reasons. (RO) is relative to *A*'s reasons in the sense that any choice that *A* makes, in order to count as a free choice, must take into consideration *A*'s own actual circumstances, obligations, relations to others, and the like. Even so, (RO) is objective in the sense that *A*'s freedom does not hinge on *whatever* *A* may happen to believe or desire. In order to be free with respect to *s*, *A* must consciously realize where the weight of reason rests vis-à-vis *s* and choose *s* for that reason. An example may serve to illustrate the two features of relativity and objectivity. Suppose two

people are at a party. Neither has scruples about social drinking; both in fact have found that a bit of restrained drinking has helped them in the past to overcome feelings of awkwardness and shyness in social settings. Both have abstemious spouses who can drive them home should they overindulge. But there is one crucial difference between them. He is self-employed and has no formal commitments tonight or tomorrow. She is a surgeon presently on call. Relative to the circumstances, his choosing to drink would be rationally preferable to his choosing not to drink, while her choosing to drink would definitely not be. Yet once the circumstances are fully exposed, it can be seen that his decision to drink and her decision not to drink are both objectively rational. Hence, according to the conception of freedom depicted by (RO), both choices are free.

Clause (iii) of (RO) applies to the case in which *A* knows that the reasons for alternative *s* are in equipoise with the reasons for not-*s*. What (iii) claims is that in such a case, the rational choice is to choose arbitrarily. In the fourth *Meditation*, Descartes frets about this circumstance: “But that indifference which I experience, when no reason urges me to one side more than to the other, is the lowest grade of liberty, and it is evidence of no perfection in it, but only a defect in intellect, or a certain negation. For if I always saw clearly what is good and true, I would never deliberate about what is to be judged or chosen, and thus, although clearly free, I could nevertheless never be indifferent.”⁸

Descartes appears to believe that in reality there are no rational ties and that to be in a state of subjective equipoise between two alternatives is to be in a cognitively deficient state, constituting the “lowest grade of liberty.” Consider Buridan’s ass, Brunellus. Equidistant from two equally attractive bales of hay, Brunellus has no more reason to head for one rather than the other and so dies of starvation. What went wrong? I take it that Descartes thinks that there must be some objective features of the situation favoring one of the bales over the other and that had Brunellus only attended to those features, he would not have starved. Let us call Descartes’s view—that there never really are two alternatives that are exactly equally preferable and that the belief that there are is based on incomplete knowledge of the situation—the “Great Chain of Value.”

⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations* IV. My translation is based on the Latin text in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. 7: *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1904), p. 58. In contrast, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann assert that “the clearest instances of free choice are cases of choosing between equally good contrary alternatives” (“Absolute Simplicity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2 [1985], 353–382; the passage is on p. 366).

On Descartes's view, Brunellus starved because of cognitive imperfection; equal distances were his *pons asinorum*.⁹ Suppose that I offer you one or the other, not both, of two crisp, new one-dollar bills. You take one, probably not articulating to yourself the reasons why you take it rather than the other. Indeed, you may *have* no reasons to articulate. If the Great Chain of Value is true, then we might say that in the case of choosing one dollar bill over the other, you really are attending to some feature of the situation that makes it objectively preferable to pick that bill and that your performance is a success, whereas Brunellus's performance was a failure. Alas, your success may not be a cognitive success. According to the Great Chain of Value, there is one and only one right dollar to choose. The corollary is that there is a *wrong* choice in this case, and you may have made it. But if there is a wrong choice to be made, in what could its wrongness be plausibly grounded? Conversely, if there is a right choice, in what could its rightness be grounded? Reflection on the seeming arbitrariness of any answer one tries to give provides motivation for rejecting the Great Chain of Value.

Clause (iii) of (RO) maintains that in cases of rational equipoise, an agent, if acting freely, will choose arbitrarily. Confronted with two equally attractive one-dollar bills, you could flip a coin to determine whether to take the one on the left or the one on the right. What you have done is initiate an unbiased procedure that will determine an outcome in a situation of rational equipoise.

Of course you need not have done anything as formal as flipping a coin in order to pick one of the dollars. Moreover, the coin-flipping strategy merely pushes the phenomenon of arbitrariness back one step: Why is it that heads is assigned to the dollar on the left? In the typical case you simply pick one dollar without undergoing any such procedure. Life is full of such episodes. "Pick a card, any card." You simply pick one; to go through a tedious pairwise comparison of all fifty-two cards would be a sign of psychopathology. Jacob

⁹ Stump and Kretzmann seem willing to console Brunellus's donkey-shade with the observation that he died while instantiating a paradigm case of free choice. If anything, cases of choosing between equally good contrary alternatives most clearly illustrate not free choice but *random* choice. Suppose that I offer you a choice between a one- and a five-dollar bill. Barring some extraordinary stage-setting, you will gladly choose the five over the one. Your choice is not random. You have a good reason for choosing the five. It seems obvious that this kind of case is the clearest instance of free choice; a case, that is, in which one chooses between *unequally* good contrary alternatives. It may be that a choice between a good and an evil is a less clear instance of a free choice. If someone offers me a choice between \$1,000 (no strings attached) and slow torture, I may say that I was made an offer "I could not refuse." For a defender of freedom as liberty of rational optimality, there is no doubt that my choice of the \$1,000 is free and that my saying that I could not refuse it is simply a remark about the overwhelming weight of reason on one side of the choice.

Horner, the protagonist of John Barth's *End of the Road*, is afflicted by the inability to choose in trivial situations. The Doctor who discovers him immobilized in Baltimore's Pennsylvania Railroad Station attempts to remedy the deficiency: "Above all, act impulsively: don't let yourself get stuck between alternatives, or you're lost. You're not that strong. If the alternatives are side by side, choose the one on the left; if they're consecutive in time, choose the earlier. If neither of these applies, choose the alternative whose name begins with the earlier letter of the alphabet. These are the principles of Sinistrality, Antecedence, and Alphabetical Priority—there are others, and they're arbitrary, but useful."¹⁰ What distinguishes Horner from the normal case is that Horner must consciously internalize and invoke a set of randomizing strategies. In the normal case of apparent equipoise it is not so clear that we *invoke* a strategy—even unconsciously—as that our behavior simply *instantiates* some strategy or other.

Brunellus's failure is not necessarily that he failed to detect which bale was rationally preferable, as the Great Chain of Value would have it, nor even that he had not internalized either of the principles of Sinistrality or Dexterity. It may be that the most we can say about failing to choose in cases of equipoise is that the behavior instantiates no strategy at all; that is, that the behavior is rationally inexplicable.

With (LI) and (LS), we noted a distinction between *A*'s being decisive about *A*'s not bringing it about that *s* and *A*'s being decisive about whether *s* obtains. Something analogous can occur with (RO). *A* can be decisive about *A*'s not choosing *s* yet not be decisive about whether *s* obtains. Freedom of choice does not always imply successful implementation of choice, although, as I have suggested, the boundaries of tolerable exceptions are far from clear.

The most distinctive consequence of the notion of liberty of rational optimality runs contrary to intuition. Recall the case of the surgeon on call choosing not to drink. Her so choosing is free qua rationally optimal. But had she chosen to imbibe in those circumstances, *that* choice would not have been free. In general, (RO) implies that we are unfree whenever we choose a rationally suboptimal alternative. There are maneuvers that a defender of (RO) can deploy to make this implication more palatable than it may be initially. For example, one might insist on distinguishing freedom from responsibility, claiming that there are actions for which we are responsible even though we did not perform them freely. It is clear that a burden of explanation lies on someone prepared to make that case.¹¹

¹⁰ John Barth, *The End of the Road* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 85.

¹¹ (RO) shares *some* features of a theory put forward by Susan Wolf in "Asymmetrical Freedom," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 151–166.

The distinctive differences among the three theories of freedom can be brought out by asking of each of them what it is *not* to be free. According to (LI), *A* is unfree if, whether he knows it or not, he lacks the power to do otherwise than what he does. Unfreedom is a kind of powerlessness. If *A* decides to remain in a room when in fact he is locked in the room, then *A* may have acted *voluntarily*, but he has not acted *freely*. (Proponents of [LI] typically assume that if *A*'s actions were causally determined, then that kind of determination would render him powerless in the relevant way.) According to (LS), unfreedom is a sort of lack of fit between desire and action. *A* acts unfreely if he is doing what he does not want to do; or, on more sophisticated accounts, if *A* is doing what he does not want to do, all things considered; or if *A* is doing what he wants to do but does not want to have the want(s) that he in fact has; or if *A* is doing what he wants to do but his wants have had the wrong sorts of causal ancestry, or are now impervious to reflective revision, . . . and so forth. According to (RO), unfreedom is a kind of ignorance or a kind of irrationality. *A* chooses unfreely if he lacks the relevant knowledge about his choice-situation (including, perhaps, self-knowledge). *A* may choose to do what is in fact the rational thing to do, but if he chooses for the wrong reasons, his choice is unfree. It is interesting to ask whether *A* can choose not-*s* if *A* fully realizes that the weight of reason is on the side of *s* over not-*s*. A defender of (RO) is not committed by that doctrine alone to hold that the rationally optimal course of action, when recognized, will always be chosen. Irrational factors may swamp reason on occasion. What a defender of (RO) is committed to holding is that on those occasions, the agent's choice is unfree.

It would be valuable to discuss the merits and weaknesses of these three theories more fully. A natural and healthy tendency would be to explore hybrid varieties of the theories.¹² Our present concern, however, is to see how the purer strains might apply to the case of God.

II. Of Divine Bondage

It seems straightforward enough to say that whichever theory one favors as a theory about human freedom, that theory can be applied to God. Moreover, on any of the theories, the way in which freedom is realized in God, it would seem, may be different from the way in which it is realized in humans, but the differences are comprehensible and entailed by the notion that God is not

¹² Michael A. Slote believes that the newer versions of (LS) already incorporate rational constraints of the type embodied in (RO); see his "Understanding Free Will," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 136–151.

subject to the limitations to which humans are subject. That is, God is free in whatever way humans are claimed to be free, but, in virtue of his possessing certain divine attributes, God, unlike humans, is *maximally* free.

Thus, an agent lacks freedom construed as (LI) if the agent lacks the power to do otherwise. To lack a power, it would seem, is to lack either an ability or an opportunity (or both). But traditional theistic belief maintains that God is omnipotent and omniscient, a being able to do, roughly, anything that can be done, and knowledgeable about every situation. It is hard to see, then, how God could ever lack a genuine power to do otherwise.¹³ And so, given God's omnipotence and omniscience, it appears that he is maximally free under the conception of freedom as (LI).

Versions of (LS) ascribe lack of freedom to an agent if the agent acts in frustration of his first-order desires, or first-order all-things-considered desires, or second-order desires, or if the agent's desires were induced by the wrong sorts of causal mechanisms. Once again, given God's omnipotence and omniscience, one cannot envision how one of his desires could be frustrated or have been inculcated in a coercive or compromising way. Nothing could coerce God. It would seem that the only thing that could frustrate one of God's desires would be another of God's desires of equal or greater strength, and the frustration would have to be at the level of logical incompatibility; otherwise both desires could be satisfied. So if God had logically incompatible desires, he would have a taint of unfreedom. However, since God is omniscient, his having logically incompatible desires is not something that could escape his attention. Since God is omnipotent, he ought to be able to modify his system of desires if he detects inconsistency among them. And, one presumes, God would have an overriding higher-order desire for consistency among his desires. If all this is so, then no frustration of desires could threaten God's maximal freedom, construed as (LS).

Consider, finally, (RO). According to this conception, ignorance and irrationality are the sources of unfreedom. If God is omniscient, then it cannot be that he is ever unfree on account of lacking knowledge. Many theists believe that God is the *standard* of rationality; thus, that no action of his could be rationally suboptimal.¹⁴ So if freedom is a matter of rational optimality, it follows once again that God is maximally free.

¹³ Some philosophers have alleged that God does not have the power to change the past, and that he does not have the power to sin. I believe that properly understood, these claims, if true, do not impose any limitations on God's power.

¹⁴ For a discussion of this thesis, see William E. Mann, "Modality, Morality, and God," *Noûs* 23 (1989), 83–99. Reprinted as Chapter 9 of this volume.

Yet it may be that other theological considerations place constraints on our speculating about God's freedom. I wish to examine the impact that three theological theses have on the attempt to characterize God's freedom along the lines indicated above. Two of the theses are familiar and indeed are implicit in the doctrines of God's omniscience and omnipotence. The third is more controversial.

An entailment of God's omniscience is that for any situation whatsoever, if that situation is the case, then God knows that that situation is the case. Nothing can escape God's ken. God's omniscience comprises more than this entailment, one presumes, but all we need at present is this entailment. Let " K " denote a two-place relation corresponding to $\{x \text{ knows that } \sigma\}$,¹⁵ where " σ " is a variable taking situations as its values, and let " g " be an individual constant translating "God." Then the first thesis, (OM), can be expressed symbolically as

$$(OM) (\sigma)(\sigma \rightarrow Kg\sigma).$$

An entailment of God's omnipotence, in tandem with the thesis that God has no incompatible desires, is the thesis that God's will is unimpedible. Nothing can thwart God's willing activity. Introducing " W " to represent a two-place relation corresponding to $\{x \text{ wills that } \sigma\}$, we can express the thesis of the unimpedibility of God's will as

$$(UW) (\sigma)(Wg\sigma \rightarrow \sigma).$$

The third, more controversial thesis is an entailment of the doctrine of divine simplicity. That doctrine maintains that God has no complexity of any kind. In particular, it maintains that there is no plurality of activity in God. There is just one divine activity, which from some points of view it is appropriate to call his *knowing*, from other points of view his *willing*, from still others his *loving*, and so on. It should be emphasized that the thesis claims that God really does know and really does will: it is just that his knowing and his willing are not two separate operations. For any situation, God's knowing that situation just is identical with God's willing that situation. The third thesis is a necessary equivalence entailed by this identity, namely,

$$(KW) (\sigma)(Kg\sigma \equiv Wg\sigma).$$

¹⁵ I use braces to function analogously to Quine's quasi-quotes.

The identity that licenses (KW) has its attractions. I have argued elsewhere that it is an important component for steering a middle course between Platonism and Cartesian possibilism with respect to God's relation to the necessary truths and between objectivism and subjectivism with respect to God's relation to absolute moral values.¹⁶ Hence I am loath to give up (KW). I am equally loath to give up (OM) or to place any restrictions on what situations are values of the variable σ : I do not believe that there are any situations that are unknown to God. Moreover, for reasons sketched above, involving God's omnipotence and his complete self-knowledge, I accept (UW) in full force: whatever God wills to be the case is the case. But the conjunction of (OM), (UW), and (KW), with no restrictions placed on the range of values for " σ ," yields some surprising results.¹⁷

Consider (UW). If " σ " is unrestricted in its range, then one sort of situation to which (UW) extends is a situation in which God does not will that some situation (call it " s ") be the case. That is, a legitimate substituent for " σ " might be " $\sim Wgs$." But if " $\sim Wgs$ " is an acceptable substituent for " σ ," then (UW) entails

$$(1) (Wg \sim Wgs \rightarrow \sim Wgs).$$

(OM) and (KW) jointly entail

$$(T1) (\sigma)(\sigma \rightarrow Wg\sigma),$$

that is, for any situation whatsoever, if that situation is the case, then God wills that it is the case. The contrapositive of (T1) is

$$(T2) (\sigma)(\sim Wg\sigma \rightarrow \sim \sigma),$$

which entails in particular

$$(2) (\sim Wgs \rightarrow \sim s).$$

Since " $\sim s$ " is a value of " σ ," (T1) entails

$$(3) (\sim s \rightarrow Wg \sim s).$$

¹⁶ See my "Modality, Morality, and God."

¹⁷ Much of the following material has its roots in reflections on chap. 5 of James F. Ross, *Philosophical Theology* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), which deals not with God's freedom but with God's omnipotence. See my "Ross on Omnipotence," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8 (1977), 142–147.

(2) and (3) entail

$$(4) (\sim Wgs \rightarrow Wg \sim s),$$

and (1) and (4) entail

$$(5) (Wg \sim Wgs \rightarrow Wg \sim s).$$

Since “*s*” was chosen arbitrarily, (4) and (5) are instances of general theses about God's willing activity, namely

$$(T3) (\sigma)(\sim Wg\sigma \rightarrow Wg \sim \sigma)$$

and

$$(T4) (\sigma)(Wg \sim Wg\sigma \rightarrow Wg \sim \sigma).$$

(T3) and (T4) are noteworthy: if they are true, they indicate two ways in which God's willing is different from ours. According to (T3), God's not willing a situation to be the case entails that he wills that situation not to be the case. And (T4) says that God's willing not to will a situation to be the case entails that he wills that situation not to be the case. It is clear that such theses do not hold for us. Smith's not willing that *s* does not entail that Smith wills that not-*s*: Smith may have no attitude whatsoever toward *s*. Similarly, Smith's willing not to will that *s* does not entail that Smith wills that not-*s*: Smith may not care one way or the other.¹⁸

Since (T3) and (T4) are perfectly general with respect to situations, we can construct from them theses dealing with negations. Replacing “ σ ” with “ $\sim\sigma$ ” and deleting double negations, we get

$$(T5) (\sigma)(\sim Wg \sim \sigma \rightarrow Wg\sigma)$$

¹⁸ (KW) allows us to construct epistemic analogues to theses (T3) and (T4):

$$(T3K) (\sigma)(\sim Kg\sigma \rightarrow Kg \sim \sigma),$$

if God does not know that a situation is the case, then he knows that it is not the case, and

$$(T4K) (\sigma)(Kg \sim Kg\sigma \rightarrow Kg \sim \sigma),$$

if God knows that he does not know that a situation is the case, then he knows that it is not the case. Analogues of (T3K) and (T4K) do not hold of us, but it should not be surprising that they hold of a genuinely omniscient being.

and

$$(T6) (\sigma)(Wg \sim Wg \sim \sigma \rightarrow Wg\sigma).$$

By (T5), if God does not will that a situation not be the case, then he wills that it be the case, and by (T6), if God wills that he not will that a situation not be the case, then he wills that it be the case. Once again it is clear that theses like (T5) and (T6) do not hold for us.

(T4) and (T6) indicate that certain kinds of second-order willing in the case of God boil down to first-order willing. But in fact, given (OM), (UW), and (KW), it is easy to show that (T4) and (T6) can be strengthened into biconditionals:

$$(T7) (\sigma)(Wg \sim Wg\sigma \equiv Wg \sim \sigma)$$

$$(T8) (\sigma)(Wg \sim Wg \sim \sigma \equiv Wg\sigma)$$

Moreover, given (OM), (UW), and (KW), we can establish the following two results:

$$(T9) (\sigma)(WgWg\sigma \equiv Wg\sigma)$$

$$(T10) (\sigma)(\sim WgWg\sigma \equiv Wg \sim \sigma)^{19}$$

In light of these four biconditional theses, we seem to be able to say either that all cases of iterated willing on God's part boil down to cases of first-order willing or that all cases of first-order willing steam up into cases of higher-order willing. These results are just what a defender of the doctrine of divine simplicity would expect. God's willing to will that *s* is *equivalent* to God's willing that *s*, according to the simplicist's interpretation of (T9), because God's activity of willing to will is *identical* with his activity of willing.

¹⁹ Here are the four epistemic versions of (T7)–(T10):

$$(T7K) (\sigma)(Kg \sim Kg\sigma \equiv Kg \sim \sigma)$$

$$(T8K) (\sigma)(Kg \sim Kg \sim \sigma \equiv Kg\sigma)$$

$$(T9K) (\sigma)(KgKg\sigma \equiv Kg\sigma)$$

$$(T10K) (\sigma)(\sim KgKg\sigma \equiv Kg \sim \sigma)$$

(T9K) applies the controversial "KK thesis" of epistemic logic—if one knows, then one knows that one knows—to God. If the thesis is true of anyone, it should be true of an omniscient being.

Theses (T1)–(T10) are thus the spawn of (OM), (UW), and (KW). Now let us see what effect the theses have on an attempt to extend the three theories of human freedom to God.

When we examined (LI), we noted that it might be that an agent, *A*, is decisive about *A*'s not bringing it about that *s* but not decisive about whether *s* obtains. *A* may thus freely refrain from bringing it about that *s* even though *s* obtains through some independent agency. But if (OM), (UW), and (KW) are true, then this distinction cannot characterize God. It is natural to suppose that for God to refrain from bringing about *s* is for God not to will that *s*; that is, for " $\sim Wgs$ " to be true. But in that case, (T3), which is itself entailed by (OM) and (KW), entails that " $Wg\sim s$ " is true. And (UW) in turn entails that " $\sim s$ " is true. So it is logically impossible, given (OM), (UW), and (KW), for " $\sim Wgs$ " and " s " to be simultaneously true. Put in English, what we have just seen is that God's refraining from bringing about *s* formally entails God's bringing about not-*s*.

Analogous results follow for (LS) and for (RO). A defender of (LS) cannot make room, when *A* is God, for a consistent distinction between *A*'s being decisive about *A*'s not bringing it about that *s* and *A*'s not being decisive about *s*. As we have just seen, the distinction cannot be between God's not willing that *s* and *s*'s obtaining anyway. It is tempting to apply one of the insights of sophisticated versions of (LS) and appeal to a higher-order act of willing to represent God's being decisive about his not bringing it about that *s*. The construction that comes to mind is " $Wg\sim Wgs$," God wills that he not will that *s*. But given (T4), that construction collapses into " $Wg\sim s$," which, in virtue of (UW), entails " $\sim s$." Once again the distinction cannot be consistently made in the case of God.

If we make the reasonable assumption that God's choosing is God's willing, then we find that the same result holds for (RO). God's not choosing (not willing) *s* is tantamount to God's choosing not-*s*, by (T3).

If we accept (OM), (UW), and (KW), then we cannot on any of our three theories of freedom distinguish in God's case between his being decisive about his not bringing it about that *s* and his not being decisive about whether *s* obtains. To put it in other terms, the way in which freedom is realized in an omniscient, unimpedibly omnipotent being, in whom knowing and willing are necessarily identical, entails that that being is decisive with respect to every situation.

Recall that the way in which maximal knowledgeability, omniscience, is realized in God may preclude his undergoing such human phenomena as learning. It is implausible to think that that kind of alleged difference constrains God's knowledge in any way. To say that God knows everything without learning anything amounts to saying that whatever there is to be known is known

already by God. The alleged differences in the way in which knowledgeability is realized in God as opposed to humans seem to be benign: they do not appear to conflict with God's being omniscient or with anything else theists typically want to affirm.²⁰ Can we say that the same is true about the way in which freedom is realized in God? Is God's being decisive about every situation a benign consequence of the way in which maximal freedom is realized in him?

There are three troublesome objections here, all of which devolve from what might be called, to preempt a term of abuse, the Problem of God's Ubiquitous Meddlesomeness. The first is that God's being universally decisive compromises, ironically, his claim to maximal freedom. For there is one sort of thing God is not free to do that I am free to do—forebear from being decisive about a situation. From the theses we have canvassed, it follows that “($\sim W_g s$ & $\sim W_g \sim s$)” entails “(s & $\sim s$)” and that “($W_g \sim W_g s$ & $W_g \sim W_g \sim s$)” entails “(s & $\sim s$).” God is, so to speak, condemned to be free. It is not at all clear that this consequence is benign.

The second objection is tied to the first. If God cannot forbear from being decisive about every situation, then there is no room for the exercise of genuine freedom in his creatures. Consider your choosing to read this chapter. It is a situation that God unimpedibly willed, and given that he did, you could not have chosen not to read it. Of course he could have unimpedibly willed that you not choose to read this chapter, but in that case, you could not have chosen to read it. In either case you cannot be free.²¹

The third objection comes hard on the heels of the second. If every situation is a product of God's unimpedible will, then God is causally responsible for sinful actions. It is not just that God passively allows humans freely to sin. It is rather that he unimpedibly wills those situations which consist in human sin. Suppose that Jones hypnotizes Smith so effectively that Smith, not aware that the suggestion was planted by Jones, murders Johnson. Whatever we want to say about Smith's responsibility for the murder, we certainly want to impute blame to Jones. Smith, we may even think, was merely a helpless instrument of Jones's nefarious activity. Now on the view of the nature and extent of God's

²⁰ Although I cannot argue the case here, I do not think that God's not having to learn about any situation poses a threat to human freedom.

²¹ Nelson Pike has made a beguiling case for saying that God's omnipotence is compatible with human freedom if we understand God's omnipotence to involve “over-power.” But for God to have over-power with respect to a situation just is for him to be able to forbear from being decisive about its obtaining or not obtaining. Thus the theses that we have uncovered about God's freedom knock the props out from under the structure Pike designed to preserve human freedom from God's omnipotence. See Nelson Pike, “Over-Power and God's Responsibility for Sin,” in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 11–35.

willing activity that has emerged above, God is like Jones, only more so. But this result belies the theistic claims that God does no evil and causes no one else to do evil.

One remedy for the Problem of God's Ubiquitous Meddlesomeness is to reject one or more of the theses that generate the problem. Another remedy is to assert that the problem is not as bad as it seems.

III. Free at Last

The first objection that defines the Problem of God's Ubiquitous Meddlesomeness maintains that on a view that accepts (OM), (UW), and (KW), God cannot forbear from being decisive about *s*; therefore, God is not maximally free. The proper response to the objection is to grant the premise but to deny that the conclusion follows from it. "God cannot forbear from being decisive about *s*" has a *de re* and a *de dicto* reading:

God's nature is such that he does not have the ability to forbear from being decisive about *s*.

The proposition that God forbears from being decisive about *s* is necessarily false.

Both readings will pass muster for a theist who maintains that God is necessarily sovereign and that the notion of God's necessary sovereignty entails that no situation escapes God's determination. When we noticed that God cannot forbear from being decisive about *s*, what we noticed, in effect, was that " $(\sim Wg s \ \& \ \sim Wg \sim s)$ " cannot possibly be true. It follows then that " $(Wg s \vee Wg \sim s)$ " must be true. In general we have:

$$(T11) (\sigma)(Wg\sigma \vee Wg \sim \sigma).^{22}$$

(T11) adds nothing to what we already had; (T11) is formally equivalent to (T3). But (T11) gives us a vivid depiction of the ubiquity of God's sovereignty.²³ Moreover, (T11) allows a theist to explain that what was alleged to be

²² Compare (T11) with

$$(T11K) (\sigma)(Kg\sigma \vee Kg \sim \sigma).$$

²³ Although I shall not defend the position here, we should understand (T11) as extending to necessary truths (including necessary truths about God) and absolute moral values. See my "Modality, Morality, and God" for an account of how God is responsible for them all.

a lack of an ability on God's part is more accurately described as a lack of a limitation. God's "inability" to forbear from being decisive about s is thus akin to God's "inability" to bring about his own nonexistence. Just as the latter is a consequence of God's necessary existence, so is the former a consequence of his necessary sovereignty.

But if necessary sovereignty entails lack of forbearance on God's part, then necessary sovereignty eliminates human freedom, according to the second objection contained in the Problem of God's Ubiquitous Meddlesomeness. If God is decisive about every situation, then there are no situations about which humans can be genuinely decisive.

At the heart of the second objection is the concern that if God is decisive about all situations, then we are powerless in two ways: God's unimpedible will to bring about s supplies all the power *needed* to bring about s , and God's decisiveness about s precludes us from having the power to bring about any situation contrary to s . The first point is that God's will seems to render any power that we might have otiose or epiphenomenal. The second point is especially troubling for a defender of (LI). If A brings it about that s , then A 's having been free with respect to s requires that A had it in his power to refrain from bringing it about that s . But if God unimpedibly willed that s and, for that matter, unimpedibly willed that A bring it about that s , then A did not have it in his power to refrain from bringing it about that s ; thus, for a defender of (LI), A did not bring about s freely.

Suppose that Smith is contemplating two different ways of building his house. He is sufficiently skilled in carpentry, masonry, plumbing, and wiring to build it himself; or he can engage the services of a contractor, Jones, to do it for him. If Smith chooses to build the house himself, then we can say, in stilted terminology, that Smith brings it about that Smith's house is built. If Smith decides to have Jones build his house, then we can say that Smith brings it about that Jones brings it about that Smith's house is built. The second case illustrates two general principles. If B is a two-place relation corresponding to $\{x \text{ brings it about that } \sigma\}$, then bringing-about is *transitive*,

$$(TB) (x)(y)(\sigma)(BxB y\sigma \rightarrow Bx\sigma).$$

So, for example, if Smith brings it about that Jones brings it about that Smith's house is built, then Smith brings it about that Smith's house is built. Moreover, cases of iterated bringings-about preserve the *efficacy of the proximate agent*,

$$(EP) (x)(y)(\sigma)(BxB y\sigma \rightarrow B y\sigma),$$

so that if Smith brings it about that Jones brings it about that Smith's house is built, then Jones brings it about that Smith's house is built.²⁴

Here is the picture that emerges. When Smith hires Jones to build Smith's house, the bringing-about of Smith's house is, if you will, a joint venture. Both of them bring it about that Smith's house is built. Of course the way in which Smith brings it about differs from the way in which Jones brings it about. Jones "does all the work," but it is the contractual activity of Smith that authorizes Jones's work and makes the work count as building Smith's house. In the circumstances described, Smith could have been the proximate agent of his house's being built, but chose instead that Jones be the proximate agent. Smith thus differs from many of us, for whom the only way we could bring it about that our houses are built is by having someone else build them. There are, in other words, some situations which some of us can only bring about indirectly, through the agency of someone (or something) else.

You may have anticipated the moral of the story. God's willing a situation just is his bringing about that situation, and so we have the following necessary biconditional:

$$(WB)(\sigma)(Wg\sigma \equiv Bg\sigma).$$

By partial substitution of equivalents, (WB) sanctions versions of (TB) and (EP) that pertain to God:

$$(TB') (y)(\sigma)(WgBy\sigma \rightarrow Bg\sigma).$$

$$(EP') (y)(\sigma)(WgBy\sigma \rightarrow By\sigma).$$

On the view we have been investigating, every situation that obtains obtains because it is willed by God, whose unimpedible willing is his unimpedible bringing-about. Yet some situations obtain because they are genuinely brought about by humans. Those situations are joint ventures between God and humans. God's willing them is sufficient to bring them about, but it does not follow that the humans who bring them about are thereby rendered inert by God's will, any more than Jones's activity is rendered ineffectual by Smith's bringing it about that Jones builds Smith's house. If you bring it about that *s*, then God brings it about that *s* and brings it about that you bring it about that *s*. Perhaps for any situation that we bring about, God could have brought about that situation directly, without our participating, as Smith could have built his

²⁴ (TB) and (EP) are standard theorems in the logic of action. See Ingmar Pörn, *The Logic of Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 14.

own house without Jones's aid. Perhaps not.²⁵ Even if he can, the point remains that if God brings it about that you bring it about that *s*, then God brings it about that *you* bring *s* about, and not even God can do *that* without your bringing about *s*.

If the unimpedibility and ubiquity of God's will are compatible with humans' having the power genuinely to act, they might nevertheless be incompatible with humans' having the power genuinely to act otherwise. This is the second point of the second objection. If you freely brought it about that *s*, à la (LI), then you must have had the power, at the appropriate time, to refrain from bringing it about that *s*. But if, at that time, God unimpedibly willed that *s* and that you bring it about that *s*, as he surely did, then you did not have it in your power to refrain from bringing it about that *s*.

The second premise is the culprit. You had the power to refrain from bringing it about that *s* if and only if God willed that you had the power to refrain, according to a view that endorses (OM), (UW), and (KW). There is nothing contradictory in the notion of God's willing both that you bring it about that *s* and that you have the power to refrain from bringing it about that *s*. What follows, if he does will both situations, is that you do not exercise your power to refrain. It does *not* follow that you *cannot* exercise your power to refrain. Let us inspect the logic of the situation more closely. Suppose that the following propositions are true.

- (6) God unimpedibly wills that you bring it about that *s*.
- (7) God unimpedibly wills that you have the power to refrain from bringing it about that *s*.

²⁵ The sixty-third proposition condemned by Bishop Stephen Tempier in the Condemnation of 1277 was "*quod Deus non potest in effectum cause secundarie sine ipsa causa secundaria*," that God cannot bring about an effect of a secondary cause without the secondary cause itself (*Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. Henricus Denifle and Aemilio Chatelain, vol. 1 [Paris: Delalain, 1889], pp. 543–555; proposition 63 is on p. 547). The good bishop seems to have been unaware that the proposition has a compound sense and a divided sense. *In sensu composito* the proposition is God cannot bring it about that there is an effect of a secondary cause which is not an effect of that secondary cause, which is not the proposition the bishop set out to condemn: the Condemnation insists on the omnipotence of God but does not extend omnipotence to include the ability to do the logically impossible. The offender is the original proposition interpreted *in sensu diviso*: There is an effect of a secondary cause which is such that God cannot bring it about without that secondary cause.

The second interpretation raises some interesting questions about God's omnipotence and the so-called necessity of origins. Can God make a genuine Chippendale chair without bringing it about that Thomas Chippendale makes the chair? Is a chair qualitatively identical to a chair made by Thomas Chippendale itself a Chippendale chair?

(6) and (7) imply, among other things,

(8) You bring it about that *s*

and

(9) You do not exercise the power you have to refrain from bringing it about that *s*.

(6) and (7) do *not* imply

(8') Necessarily, you bring it about that *s*,

or

(9') Necessarily, you do not exercise the power you have to refrain from bringing it about that *s*.

(8') and (9') would be implied by

(6') Necessarily, God unimpedibly wills that you bring it about that *s*

and

(7') Necessarily, God unimpedibly wills that you have the power to refrain from bringing it about that *s*,

eked out with necessary truths to the effect that if God unimpedibly wills a situation, that situation obtains, and that if you bring about a situation when you have the power to refrain, then you do not at that time exercise your power to refrain. But it would take extremely powerful arguments to force us to accept propositions as strong as (6') and (7').

The traditional problem of evil is a problem of understanding how a perfectly good, all-knowing, all-powerful God can allow the existence of evil in his domain. The problem—more accurately, the family of problems—is the most severe test of the enterprise of philosophical theology and of religious belief. As it surfaces from the theses we have been examining, the problem can only appear to be even worse. The most monstrous deeds in the history of humankind will all have been joint ventures between God and human perpetrators, and so we must ask not why God *passively allows* evil to exist but rather why he *actively wills* evil to exist, brings evil about, is a willing conspirer in the evildoer's activity.

I cannot offer a theodicy on behalf of the view developed in this essay. I can do something considerably more modest; namely, argue that the view fares no worse on the problem of evil than other views that maintain that God only allows evil to exist and suggest the direction that I think an adequate theodicy must take.

Consider yet another earthly analogy. Smith intentionally supplies Jones with the weapon, the training, and the opportunity to kill a healthy, blameless Johnson. It is clear that if Jones is successful, Smith is at least as morally accountable for Johnson's death as Jones is. Now let us change the case. Smith has not supplied Jones with any assistance. But Smith is in the same room with Jones, watching Jones prepare to kill Johnson. Smith knows that unless he, Smith, intervenes, Jones will be successful. Smith has it in his power to intervene so subtly and effortlessly that Jones will not even realize that it is Smith who has thwarted his plans. Smith elects not to intervene, allowing Jones to kill Johnson. Is Smith any the less morally accountable in this case than in the first case? Notice that the question is not about causal responsibility but moral accountability. Suppose that Johnson's survivors become informed of the power that Smith had but did not exercise. They are entitled, it seems to me, to regard Smith with the same moral outrage that they may hold for Jones. Philosophers have vigorously disagreed about whether there is a significant moral difference (and not simply a causal difference) between killing and letting die. That difference is not the one exemplified in our two cases, however: What they illustrate is a distinction between killing and allowing to be killed.

In the case of God especially, a being who is perfectly good, all-knowing, all-powerful, and against whom no other being can prevail, there is no plausible moral difference between his actively bringing about a situation that is evil and his passively allowing a situation that is evil to be brought about. We sometimes excuse human agents for not intervening when they might have because we think that the cost of intervention to them would have been inordinately high. We sometimes loathe and sometimes pity those who fail to intervene because of their stupidity, cowardice, venality, callousness, or other sorts of character flaws. But we do not suppose that God has or could have any of those human liabilities. And so God's passively allowing a situation that is evil to be brought about is on a par, morally speaking, with his actively bringing about that situation. The distinction between passivity and activity does no moral work in the case of God.

This conclusion meshes with (although it is not entailed by) the metaphysical result that there is no difference between God's not bringing it about that *s* and God's bringing it about that not-*s*. Independent of that, the conclusion has the bracing effect—as one says when one tries to make a virtue of necessity—of forcing theists to face the problem of evil in its starkest form. Saying that

God actively brings about evil situations makes matters no worse for the prospect of theodicy than does saying that God passively allows evil situations to be brought about. The question now is just how bad that makes matters for the prospects of theodicy.

I want to argue that the claim that God brings about situations that are evil does not imply that God *does* evil; thus, that the claim is compatible with the doctrines that God is morally perfect and impeccable. It will help to consider what seems to be the hardest kind of case for my contention. Under what circumstances, if any, are all the elements of the following scenario true?

- (1) A knowingly and willingly brings it about that B knowingly and willingly brings it about that s.
- (2) A knowingly and willingly brings it about that s (From [1] by [TB]).
- (3) s is a situation that is evil.
- (4) In knowingly and willingly bringing it about that s, B does something that is wrong.
- (5) In knowingly and willingly bringing it about that s, A does not do anything that is wrong.

What we are seeking is not an *excuse* for A's action but a *justification* for it. To excuse an agent's action is to acknowledge that although what the agent did was wrong, the agent should not be blamed or punished for it or should only be blamed or punished to a diminished degree. Some of the sorts of considerations offered as excuses—for example, factual ignorance and duress—do not apply here, since we are supposing that A acts knowingly and willingly. Other sorts, such as physical weakness and mental abnormality, do not apply in the case in which A is God. In any event, what is wanted is not something that presupposes that what A did was wrong but rather that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, what he did was not wrong.

There are at least two ways in which A's action might be insulated from a charge of wrongdoing. It might be that A's intentions, purposes, and goals justify his action. Or it might be that A enjoys a special status or plays a special role that makes his action "privileged." Let us put together a case that combines both features.

If John's parents do not prevent him, he will break his sister Mary's favorite toy, because she heedlessly broke one of his favorite toys. By deciding not to restrain John, John's parents bring it about that he brings it about that Mary's toy is broken; thus, they bring it about that Mary's toy is broken. What John does is wrong. What John's parents do is not wrong, even though they bring about what John brings about; namely, that Mary's toy is broken. How can that

be? The wrongness of John's action (in distinction from the badness of the situation that is the action's result) lies in the intention or motive with which John commits the action. John acts in retaliatory rage, with the intention of inflicting suffering on Mary. In contrast, John's parents act out of love for their children, with the intention of using the episode to illustrate vividly to John and Mary the futility of pursuing a policy of tit for tat. They believe that only by allowing John to act out his rage will he come to feel, through seeing Mary suffer, the bitter emptiness of his action. They believe that Mary will learn to be more careful with things that are not hers. They hope that each child's witnessing the suffering so easily inflicted on the other—and so easily inflicted *by* the other—will strengthen, not weaken, the children's empathy and the bonds of sibling affection. Because they are the children's parents, they occupy a special moral status that confers on them a network of rights, duties, liberties, and immunities with respect to the children. Suppose a casual friend had been present instead of the parents, with the same beliefs and hopes that the parents did in fact have. It is not obvious that the friend's decision not to restrain John is above moral reproach. The friend's action smacks of presumption, of arrogating to himself a course of action that may only rightly be followed by the parents.

The example portrays a way in which items (1)–(5) can all be true. Moreover, it suggests two strategies for dealing with the problem of evil that are available to a theist attracted to the doctrines contained in this essay. God's plans for us are not transparent: now we see through a glass darkly. It is not immediately obvious to Mary why her parents endorsed John's breaking her toy. But if Mary's moral growth can only proceed by means of this or similar sorts of experiences, then the point of her parents' action can only be clear to Mary after she has become what they had hoped she would become. So it may be that God can bring about certain kinds of moral and spiritual growth in us only by confronting us with genuine evils. And it may be that the point of his activity can become clear to us only as a result of our facing the travails. Furthermore, God's relation to us as loving Creator invests in him, we may suppose, certain rights and responsibilities, privileges and immunities, that may be reflected with some accuracy in some of the aspects of the human relations of parent to child, lawgiver to subject, judge to judged. Mary would be entitled to complain about the family friend's decision not to restrain John but perhaps not about her parents' identical decision. We would be guilty of overlooking the unique moral position that God occupies if we thought without further argument that anything God does to us is on a par, morally speaking, with anything a stranger might do to us. This observation cuts two ways. Things impermissible for a stranger to do to us may be

permissible for God, but God may also have responsibilities to us that no stranger does.²⁶

These remarks scarcely begin the task of theodicy. It would be foolhardy to assume that the two strategies will handle adequately all legitimate questions about God's justice. My purpose has not been to argue that the two strategies are adequate or complete but only to show how the project of theodicy can get off the ground within the framework of assumptions made in this essay.

To recapitulate, the assumptions are that God is omniscient, that God's will is unimpedible, and that in God there is no real distinction between knowing and willing. The three theories of freedom coalesce in the case of God. Qua omnipotent, God enjoys maximally realized liberty of indifference. Qua sovereign, he enjoys maximally realized liberty of spontaneity. Qua supremely rational, he enjoys maximally realized liberty of rational optimality. One may take a methodological moral from this peaceful coexistence. There is nothing about the three theories themselves that makes them incompatible with each other: one being exemplifies them all. The good news is that that fact might encourage us to try to construct hybrid versions of the theories. The bad news is that their simultaneous realization in God may depend essentially on his being a being in whom knowing and willing are not two things. Human psyches do not enjoy such integration.²⁷

²⁶ This sort of possibility is compatible with ethical absolutism and with the thesis that God has no obligations to his creatures.

²⁷ An earlier version of this chapter benefited from the critical comments of Hilary Kornblith and Derk Pereboom.

The Best of All Possible Worlds

Genesis 1:31 says that the world God created was very good. What is it for the world to be good? Why did God choose to create this particular world over all the other possible worlds he might have created?¹ Concern for questions of this kind can be traced back to Plato's *Timaeus*. The latter question is one of the leitmotifs of Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic study *The Great Chain of Being*. But the question, when coupled with plausible intuitions about God's nature, is the source of a dilemma. If God's nature includes being maximally free, all-powerful, and completely sovereign over all aspects of creation, then it would seem that he could have created just any world or refrained from creating altogether. However, if God's nature also includes being perfectly good and all-loving, then it would seem that there are many worlds that he could not have created; in fact, it would seem that he could create only a maximally good world. And so it would seem that God cannot simultaneously be maximally free and perfectly good.

The task of this chapter is to see whether and to what extent these two intuitions about God's creative choice can be made consistent. I begin by examining two extreme views in the history of philosophy about God's creative choice, views that will serve to dramatize the issues but that exact too high a price from our intuitions. I develop these two views in a chronological order spanning roughly four and a half centuries. It is not necessary to my case that the chronological order also be causal. It is sufficient that it be dialectical. I then search for an inhabitable middle ground. The reconnoitering consists of an examination of presuppositions about the comparative values of possible worlds and of presuppositions about God's nature.

¹ If one prefers, one can phrase the second question as "Why did God choose to create the actual world the way it is?" I use the notion of possible worlds as a heuristic device in this chapter without taking a stance on their ontological status.

I. Three Grades of Voluntaristic Involvement

The bishop of Paris's condemnation in 1277 of 219 propositions in philosophy, theology, and science provides us with a convenient place to begin our exploration. There are two strands of thought contained in the condemnation that abetted the development of an extreme version of voluntarism at the hands of fourteenth-century Franciscan philosophers. One of the strands can be followed by beginning with proposition 34: "that the first cause cannot make many worlds" (Denifle and Chatelain 1889, p. 545). The intent of condemning this proposition was to deny the necessity of the Aristotelian doctrine that our world order—the totality of things bounded by the spherical circumference of the fixed stars—is unique. It may be true that our world is unique, but if so, that truth is not necessary: it lay within God's unlimited power to create more than one world. To modern ears it sounds as though proposition 34 could be the denial of one or more of these positive theses about God's powers:

- (1) God can make many worlds successively in time.
- (2) God can make many contemporaneous worlds in different spatial locations.
- (3) There are at least two possible worlds such that God can make *both* of them to be actual.

Contemporary philosophers, familiar with possible-worlds semantics for modal logic, would insist that thesis (3) is categorically different from theses (1) and (2). They would claim that when understood properly, the notion of an actual world entails both that *any* possible world might have been actual and that *no more than one* possible world can be actual.² As Leibniz would put it more than four centuries later, "I call *World* the whole succession and the whole collection of all existent things, so that it [can] not be said that several worlds could exist in different times and different places" (Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, p. 107). Thus even if the only constraint on God's powers is the inability to bring about contradictions—and that surely was the message conveyed by the Condemnation of 1277—these philosophers would insist that (3) cannot be true.

But it seems that whatever analysis of "possible world" (perhaps, for example, *a maximally consistent set of propositions, all of which are true*) is alleged to make thesis (3) a logical impossibility will also make theses (1) and (2)

² If I understand him correctly, not even David Lewis takes himself to be denying these claims. See Lewis 1986, pp. 97–104.

logically impossible. Conversely, whatever analysis of “possible world” that makes theses (1) and (2) logically possible (for example, *the totality of things bounded by a spherical circumference of fixed stars*) will also make thesis (3) logically possible. On these issues medievals and moderns may thus disagree more on the correct analysis of “possible world” (and “actual world”) than on what is true about the actual world and other possible worlds.³ Modern commentators have noted that the Condemnation of 1277, while attempting to stifle the contamination of Christian dogma by Aristotelian physics, ironically had the effect of encouraging non-Aristotelian physical speculation, since the denial of crucial aspects of Aristotelian physics seemed to entail no contradictions.⁴ It is enough for our present purposes to note that proposition 34, if it did not encourage speculation about other possible worlds in the post-Leibnizian sense of the term, did encourage speculation about other “actual” worlds, whose inhabitants, histories, and physics might differ from those of our world.

The second strand can be teased out of the condemnation of proposition 163: “that the will necessarily pursues what is firmly believed by reason [*quod firmiter creditum est a ratione*], and that it cannot abstain from that which reason dictates. Moreover, this necessity is not compulsion, but the nature of the will” (Denifle and Chatelain 1889, p. 552). It is significant that this proposition does not confine itself to *human* wills. It would have been hard for a reader to miss the point that one of the consequences of the condemnation of proposition 163 is that God’s will does not necessarily follow his reason; it can abstain from what his reason dictates.

When combined, the two strands yield the following version of the *potentia Dei absoluta*. God’s *power* is unlimited. God can do anything whatsoever that does not involve a contradiction. In particular, he is not constrained by merely *physical* necessity. He has the power to create any *metaphysically* possible world. God’s *will* is similarly unlimited. It is emphatically not necessitated by God’s reason. The Condemnation of 1277 had the effect of giving pride of place to two of the traditional divine attributes, omnipotence and freedom. Just as the preeminence of God’s omnipotence came to play an important role in metaphysics, determining what is, what might be, what must be, so the preeminence of God’s will became important in value theory, determining ultimate ends, good and bad, right and wrong.

³ Moderns have disagreed with other moderns about this. See the criticism of David Lewis’s views in Stalnaker 1976.

⁴ See Blumenberg 1983, pp. 160–163; Dick 1982, pp. 28–43; Dijksterhuis 1961, pp. 161–163, 173–174; Funkenstein 1986, pp. 57–63; Grant 1971, pp. 27–29; Grant 1974, pp. 45–50; and Grant 1982, pp. 537–539.

Theological voluntarism is any general thesis to the effect that relative to some domain, God's will is determinative. A specific version of theological voluntarism undergirds divine command theories of moral obligation: God's enjoining (forbidding) an action is what makes the action right (wrong). It is easy to confuse this version with another version of theological voluntarism that holds that God's will determines what is good and what is bad. If intrinsic goodness is supposed to be goodness independent of *all* attitudes, then this second variety of theological voluntarism denies that anything is intrinsically good, for God's approving attitude is always necessary in order for something to be good. Parallel remarks hold for intrinsic badness: a thing is bad or evil just because God disapproves of it.

Under the influence, perhaps, of the Condemnation of 1277, Franciscan thinkers during the first half of the fourteenth century put forward the ingredients of an extreme version of theological voluntarism.⁵ I identify two stages of Franciscan voluntarism, the second more extreme than the first. I then look briefly at a third, even more extreme, stage, due not to the Franciscans but rather to Descartes.

Lovejoy called attention to a passage from *De Rerum Principio*, which he guardedly attributed to John Duns Scotus but which is now ascribed to Vital du Four. "Every creature has an accidental relation to the goodness of God, because nothing is added to his goodness from them, just as a point adds nothing to a line."⁶ The passage is embedded in a section in which du Four argues against the idea that God wills what he wills out of necessity: the opinion du Four is especially concerned to excoriate is the opinion, attributed to Avicenna, that God's will necessarily wills whatever God's knowledge perceives to be a better course of action.

One can interpret du Four's remark in such a way that it allows that some creatures have intrinsic value, even that some creatures are intrinsically more valuable than others, but simply denies that the existence of any of them can add to God's goodness. This interpretation would stress that God's goodness is perfect and infinite, thus that the addition of any amount of created goodness cannot increase his goodness. In fact, one can maintain further that the addition of any amount of created goodness cannot increase the aggregate amount of goodness in existence, since God's goodness alone provides an infinite

⁵ Franciscan activities in the direction of voluntarism had begun before the condemnation and may indeed have shaped some of the elements of it. See Korolec 1982 for further details and references.

⁶ Du Four 1891, p. 307; see Lovejoy 1936, p. 156. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. I include, as an appendix to this chapter, a translation of the section of *De Rerum Principio* in which the passage appears.

amount of goodness in existence. Such an interpretation is consistent with everything else du Four says. Moreover, medieval philosophers of du Four's time were sufficiently well versed in the logical peculiarities of the concept of infinity to make, appreciate, and dispute such observations.⁷ But these observations might have been made equally well by means of an analogy that compared finite line segments to an infinitely long line: the addition of them to it would increase neither its length nor, so to speak, the amount of length in existence.⁸ What is the point of the *point* in du Four's analogy? Serious consideration of that analogy suggests a voluntaristic interpretation of du Four's remark.

Points cannot add to the length of a line because by their nature points have no length to add. Creatures, on analogy, cannot contribute to the stock of goodness in existence, not only because that stock has infinite value before their arrival on the scene, but also because by their nature creatures have no goodness to contribute. It is a mistake, on this interpretation, to think of any possible world that God might have created as being by its nature better or worse than any other. All possible worlds—or at least all the parts of all possible worlds whose existence depends on being created—are by their nature equally valueless. Unlike points, however, which cannot (logically) acquire length, creatures can acquire goodness. They acquire goodness only through the activity of God's will. The analogy is thus not perfect. That points have no length "by their nature" is a way of saying that a point's having length is *against* its nature. That creatures are not good "by their nature" is a way of saying not that goodness is against their natures but rather that there is nothing in their natures that *entails* that they are good. With the possible exception of God, nothing is good by its nature. Goodness is not an intrinsic property of (created) things, nor does it supervene necessarily on a thing's intrinsic properties. Goodness is an extrinsic, relational property of things, founded solely in God's will.

The view portrayed in this interpretation owes us an account of Genesis 1:31: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." A curious feature about this passage is its *not quite* paratactic structure. It could be recast as two independent units related only by topic—"God saw every thing that he had made; it was very good"—except for the presence of "behold." The view we are considering can exploit this feature. God's seeing that the created world is very good cannot merely be a matter of his taking notice of a feature of creation that exists independently of his attitudes, shaping those attitudes. It is rather that God's seeing that creation is very good just is his approving it, and his approving it is what constitutes its goodness, what

⁷ See Murdoch 1982, pp. 564–591.

⁸ Not everyone would have assented to this. See the discussion of the "paradox of unequal infinities" in Murdoch 1982, pp. 569–571.

makes it good. “Behold” functions here to signify the indissoluble relationship between the performative act of God’s seeing that the world is very good and the intrinsic result of that act; namely, that what is seen to be good has its goodness constituted by that very act of seeing.

This interpretation of du Four’s text claims that the actual world, like every other possible world, has no natural, intrinsic goodness in itself and that what we would normally think of as intrinsic goodness in the actual world is goodness conferred by God’s approving activity. Although it is not strictly dictated by du Four’s text, I shall for the sake of convenience call the view expressed in this interpretation “du Four’s view.”

Du Four’s view is clearly a robust specimen of theological voluntarism. Its chief source of attractiveness is the same intuition that motivates divine command ethical theories. If God is genuinely sovereign over creation, then his sovereignty ought not to be merely executive and judicial but also legislative. If his functions were confined to creating and judging according to values over which he had no say, then he would not be sovereign over those values. Although he might by his activities be an impressive *conduit* of value, he would not be the *font* of value. One positive feature of du Four’s view is that it depicts God as the source of goodness in the most straightforward way imaginable.

On du Four’s view, God’s will does not operate by acknowledging the good-making intrinsic properties of things; his will establishes what properties *count* as good-making. Analogous remarks apply to badness or evil. God could have created a world whose inhabitants are incapable of scientific discovery, aesthetic appreciation, and moral sentiment, who are exquisitely sensitive to the pain to which they are perpetually subjected, and who rise above that pain solely to inflict torture on helpless animals. Had God declared that world to be good, ipso facto it would have been good. Had he “seen” that the actual world, the world he did create, was very rotten, it would have been very rotten. Any world God picks can have any dimension of value he declares it to have, just in virtue of his act of declaration.⁹ The pursuit of wisdom is a good thing, but it might have been replaced by the practice of sadism. Charity is a virtue, but in some possible worlds hardness of heart is the summum bonum.

⁹ It might seem that on du Four’s view, counterfactual comparisons of value cannot be made. Suppose one claims that the world would have been better had Hitler never been born. A plausible analysis of counterfactuals in terms of possible worlds might maintain that (most of?) those worlds identical in history to the actual world up to the time at which Hitler was born and in which Hitler is not born have better subsequent histories than the actual world. But if nonactual possible worlds have no value at all, how can such comparisons be made? A defender of du Four’s view can maintain that by holding as fixed the good-making characteristics of the actual world, we can apply them to assessments we make of other possible worlds. What we must not forget is that those good-making characteristics are entirely the product of God’s will.

Some voluntarists flinch at these consequences; du Four might be one of them. Immediately before the passage about points and lines, du Four says that “since the will of God is not moved per se except to an adequate good, which is his goodness, it is not moved necessarily to what it wills, except for all those divine and solely intrinsic qualities that are essentially connected to his goodness” (*De Rerum Principio*; Du Four 1891, p. 307). God does will some things of necessity, including his own goodness. One might then try to argue that God’s necessarily willing his goodness precludes him from willing as good those things that are incompatible with his goodness. If hardness of heart in creatures is incompatible with God’s goodness, then there could be no possible world in which God’s will determines hardness of heart as a good.

This maneuver collapses, however, if God’s being essentially good places no constraints whatsoever on what he might will to be good and will to be bad with respect to creatures. William of Ockham appears to have held this second, more extreme version of voluntarism. One of Ockham’s more salient doctrines is a *separability thesis*. Surely if anything is an unconditional, intrinsic evil for a theist, it is hatred of God. Yet according to Ockham,

God can cause any independent thing (*omne absolutum*) without [causing] anything else that is not identical to that independent thing. But the act of hating God, insofar as it is an independent thing in itself, is not identical to the deformity and wickedness of the act. Therefore God can cause whatever is independent in the act of hating or rejecting God, [while] not causing any deformity or wickedness in the act. (Ockham 1981, p. 342)

Ockham believes that the badness of any created thing is always distinct from and accidental to the thing itself. The same holds true of creaturely goodness: in a passage immediately following, Ockham says that the goodness of love of God is separable from the love. This part of Ockham’s view, although provocatively illustrated, does not go beyond du Four’s view. But Ockham also holds a particularly strong version of the thesis that God is essentially good: “The divine wisdom is the same as the divine essence in all the ways in which the divine essence is the same as the divine essence; so also for divine goodness and justice. Nor does any distinction exist there within the nature of the thing, or even nonidentity” (Ockham 1970, p. 17). Divine goodness and divine justice are not *parts* of the divine essence: they *are* the divine essence.¹⁰ God’s essence is to be perfectly good, which is the same essence as to be perfectly just.

¹⁰ For a discussion of this and related issues concerning Ockham’s version of God’s simplicity, see Marilyn McCord Adams 1987, vol. 2, ch. 21.

Because he holds both the separability thesis and the thesis that God's essence is to be perfectly good, Ockham must think that God's being perfectly good has no necessary consequences concerning goodness in the created world. There is nothing overtly contradictory about Ockham's position, but it leaves unexplained how God's perfect goodness makes any difference to the goodness of the created world. Because God's will determines what counts as created goodness and because God's perfect goodness places no constraints on what he could have willed for creatures, Ockham's position assigns God's perfect goodness to a kind of explanatory limbo.

Perhaps it is worse than that. Consider Ockham's case of creaturely hatred of God. The separability thesis implies that it could have been good. Ockham's voluntarism entails that hatred of God is good if and only if God wills it so. In the idiom of possible worlds, there is a world, w , in which God wills that creaturely hatred of him is good. However, according to Ockham, God is essentially and perfectly good, or perfectly good in all possible worlds. Thus in w a perfectly good God wills that hatred of him is good. Consider now the following claims. (A) If hatred of God is good, then one ought to hate God. (B) If God is perfectly good, then God is the proper object of love. (C) If God is the proper object of love, then one ought to love God. (D) There is no possible world in which a perfectly good God confronts his creatures with a fundamental moral dilemma not of their own making. If (A) is true, then the creatures in w ought to hate God. If (B) and (C) are true, then the creatures in w ought to love God. Thus the creatures in w are confronted with a fundamental moral dilemma not of their own making, contrary to (D). The set of claims (A)–(D) is thus inconsistent with the separability thesis and the thesis that God's essence is to be perfectly good.

An Ockhamite can avoid the inconsistency by denying the necessity of any of claims (A)–(D). A conservative deployment of that strategy would be to maintain that one or more of the claims is an impostor. A less conservative deployment would be to deny that there are any necessary truths or—what is not the same—to assert that even if there are necessary truths, God's omnipotence is such that he can alter them. Neither du Four nor Ockham regarded this as a possibility. A third version of voluntarism, then, the *ne plus ultra* of voluntarism, is to claim that God's power extends even over the realm of necessity. Descartes is notorious for having asserted this thesis. In his reply to the sixth set of objections to his *Meditations* he explicitly embraces theological voluntarism with regard to both goodness and necessity.

As for freedom of will, it is in God in a way far different from [the way it is] in us. For it is repugnant to the will of God not to have been indifferent from eternity to all that has taken place or ever will take

place, because nothing good or true, or nothing that is to be believed or done or omitted can be imagined, for which the idea will have been in the divine intellect before God's will decides that it be of that kind as a result. Nor do I speak here of priority of time; it is not even prior in order, or nature, or the processes of reason (*ratione ratiocinata*), as they say—namely, such that that idea of good impelled God to choose one thing over another. Certainly, to give an example, he did not thus will to create the world in time because he saw it to be better thus than if he created from eternity; nor did he will the three angles of a triangle to be equal to two right angles because he knew it could not be made in another way, etc. On the contrary, because he willed to create the world in time, it is thus better so than if he had created from eternity, and because he willed the three angles of a triangle necessarily to be equal to two right angles, therefore now this is true and cannot be made in another way; and so on for the rest. (Descartes 1904, pp. 431–432)

II. Rationalism, *ou l'optimisme*

Whether he knew about the fourteenth-century Franciscans or not, Leibniz did know about Cartesian voluntarism. The following passage from Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* gives some of his reasons for rejecting it.¹¹

I am far removed from the sentiments of those who maintain that there are no principles of goodness and perfection in the nature of things, or in the ideas that God has of them; and that the works of God are good only for the formal reason that God has made them. For if this were so, God, knowing that he is the author of them, would not have to regard them afterwards and find them good, as Holy Scripture testifies In saying that things are not good through any principle of goodness, but solely through the will of God, one destroys, without thinking of it, it seems to me, all the love of God and all his glory. For why praise him for what he has done if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing everything to the contrary? Or where will his justice and his wisdom thus be, if there remains only a certain despotic power, if the will takes the place of reason, and if, according to the definition of

¹¹ For further discussion of Descartes's voluntarism, see Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée*, paras. 180–186; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, pp. 221–228.

tyrants, that which pleases the most powerful is by that very fact just? Besides, it seems that every will presupposes some reason for willing and that this reason is naturally anterior to the will. This is why I find, moreover, this expression of some other philosophers utterly strange, who say that the eternal truths of metaphysics and geometry—and as a consequence, also the principles of goodness, justice, and perfection—are only the effects of the will of God. Instead, it seems to me that they are the consequences of his understanding, which does not depend on his will, any more than his essence [does]. (Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 4, pp. 427–428 [sec. 2])

According to Leibniz, God surveyed all the infinitely many possible worlds and chose to create the actual world because it was the best. When God looked out over the possible worlds, what exactly did he see? Why did he choose the best?

Near the end of the essays on theodicy Leibniz presents a lengthy epitome of Lorenzo Valla's dialogue *De libero arbitrio*.¹² Leibniz applauds Valla's attempt to show that God's *foreknowledge* of free, sinful actions is compatible with their being free and sinful. He is less happy, however, with what he perceives to be agnosticism on Valla's part about whether God's *will* to create sinful persons is compatible with their being solely responsible for their sins. Leibniz adopts the artifice of writing a continuation of Valla's dialogue in order to show that such agnosticism is ill founded. The continuation recapitulates many of Leibniz's characteristic doctrines, including the claims that to create a person different in any respect from the way that person is would be not to create *that* person but some counterpart and that the existence of certain sinful actions is an essential component of the world's being the best world possible. The continuation gives us a strikingly vivid picture of how Leibniz conceived the possible worlds to be ordered in terms of value. The goddess Pallas guides Theodorus, a high priest, through the realm of possible worlds:

The apartments [each "apartment" corresponds to a possible world] arose in a pyramid; they became ever more beautiful as one ascended towards the apex, and they represented more beautiful worlds. One arrived at last in the supreme ["apartment"] that completed the pyramid, and which was the most beautiful of all; for the pyramid had a beginning, but one did not see the end; it had an apex, but no base; it went on increasing to infinity. It is because (as the Goddess explained)

¹² A translation of this work can be found in Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall 1948, pp. 155–182.

among an infinity of possible worlds there is the best of all; otherwise God would not have decided to create any of them. But there is not any of them which does not have yet less perfect [worlds] beneath it: that is why the pyramid descends forever to infinity. (*Essais de Théodicée*, paragraph 416; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, p. 364)

The imagery of a “great chain of being” might have suggested that the possible worlds are arranged on a scale of betterness like the links on a chain. We might have supposed, to put it more formally, that the better-than relation displays *connectivity* in the realm of all possible worlds;¹³ that is, for any two possible worlds, w and u , either w is better than u or u is better than w . Leibniz’s choice of a pyramid, however, suggests a different picture.

We may distinguish the semantic properties of the better-than relation from its substantive conditions. The semantic properties are just those properties that would be assigned to the relation on any reasonable interpretation of it. With respect to any domain but relativized to the realm of possible worlds, the semantic properties include:

Irreflexivity: No possible world is better than itself.

Asymmetry: For any possible worlds, w and u , if w is better than u , then u is not better than w .

Transitivity: For any possible worlds, w , u , and v , if w is better than u and u is better than v , then w is better than v .

The substantive conditions of the better-than relation are those conditions Leibniz imposes on it with respect to the realm of possible worlds and which give rise to his vision of an infinitely descending pyramid of possible worlds:

Seriality: Every possible world is better than some other possible worlds.

Seriality is that feature in virtue of which the pyramid has no base.

Maximality: Some possible world is better than every other possible world.

Maximality plus Asymmetry entail that *only* one world is better than every other possible world. For suppose that there are *two* worlds, w and u , such that w is better than every other possible world and u is better than every other possible world. Then w would be better than u and u would be better than w . But that contradicts Asymmetry. So Maximality, eked out with Asymmetry, is

¹³ There are familiar Cantorian worries about the notion of the realm or set of all possible worlds. No harm will come to us in this chapter if we indulge ourselves in the supposition that the notion makes sense.

that feature in virtue of which the pyramid has a genuine apex, not merely a highest plateau.

Comparability: For any possible worlds, w and u , either w is better than u or u is better than w or w and u are equal in value.

Comparability differs from connectivity in that the former but not the latter allows two or more possible worlds to be equal in value, thus allowing a chain structure to become a pyramid structure.

The imagery of a pyramid accommodates comparability for a reason that Leibniz could fully appreciate.¹⁴ Consider any locus of points within a pyramid such that each point is the same distance from the apex as every other point in that locus. There will be infinitely many such loci in a pyramid, each one of which will be composed of infinitely many points.¹⁵ If the pyramid is Leibniz's pyramid of possible worlds, any such locus will be a family of possible worlds, each world of which is no closer to and no further from the apex, the best possible world. It is natural to think, then, that in Leibniz's pyramid of possible worlds, each member of such a family is no better (no closer to the best possible world) and no worse (no further from the best possible world) than any of its confreres. Under these circumstances it is natural to suppose that all the worlds in the family are equal in value.

It is Leibniz's contention that God's choice to create the best possible world was not made accidentally. God created the best world because he knew that it

¹⁴ One of Leibniz's favorite illustrations of the law of continuity is the rotation of a plane through a cone, thus generating the conic sections. See Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 3, pp. 51–52; vol. 4, pp. 375–376.

¹⁵ "The infinity of possibles, however great it be, is not greater than that of the wisdom of God, who knows all the possibles. One can even say that if this wisdom does not surpass the possibles extensively—since the objects of the understanding could not go beyond the possible, which in a sense is only [the] intelligible—it surpasses them intensively, because of the infinitely infinite combinations that it makes of them, as well as the thoughts it has of them. The wisdom of God, not content to embrace all the possibles, penetrates them, compares them, weighs them one against the other, in order to rate the degrees of perfection or of imperfection, the strong and the weak, the good and the bad. It goes even beyond the finite combinations; it makes an infinity of infinities of them, that is to say, an infinity of possible orders of the universe, each of which contains an infinity of creatures. And by this means the divine wisdom distributes all the possibles that it had already envisaged separately into so many universal systems that it compares again between them. And the result of all these comparisons and reflections is the choice of the best from among all these possible systems, which wisdom makes in order to satisfy goodness fully; this is precisely the plan of the actual universe. And all these operations of the divine understanding, although they have among themselves an order and a natural priority, always occur together, without their having among themselves a temporal priority." (*Essais de Théodicée*, para. 225; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, p. 252)

was best. But how exactly is his knowing connected to his choosing? Could he have chosen another, suboptimal world? Was his choice necessitated?

Leibniz thinks it important to distinguish between metaphysical necessity and moral necessity. God's selecting the best possible world was not metaphysically necessitated because there were other possible worlds that might have existed, insofar as nothing internal to them disqualified them from existing.¹⁶ God's selecting the best possible world was morally necessitated, yet to act with moral necessity is to act from a reason or motive that "inclines without necessitating."¹⁷ This notion has understandably troubled some of Leibniz's critics.¹⁸ I think that the best way to make it intelligible, if it can be made intelligible, is along the following lines.

Suppose that you are confronted with a situation of choice in which you know that you can either make one deserving person happy or just as easily make each of two deserving people as happy as the one would have been. The morally necessary thing to do in such a situation is to make the two people happy instead of just the one. The notion of moral necessity is a deontic notion, not in the sense of specifying what your duties or obligations are to other people—you may have no relevant duties or obligations to the people in question—but rather in the sense of specifying what is required of you if you are to behave as a fully rational agent. You can choose to make just the one person happy, but so to choose, in the imagined circumstances, is to choose in a rationally suboptimal way. To the extent to which you are guided by the ideal of a fully rational agent, you are inclined but not necessitated to make rationally optimal choices. The more closely your life emulates that of a fully rational agent, the more ingrained this inclination will be, and the more unthinkable you will find it that *you*, constituted as you are, could choose in any other way.

God's nature is to be supremely knowledgeable, powerful, and good; for Leibniz the medley of these traditional attributes entails that God is a supreme rational optimizer. God's selecting the best possible world, then, was morally necessitated, not because he was duty-bound to create it, but because it is unthinkable that a being with his nature, a being beyond moral reproach, would do less than the best. "For as a lesser evil is a kind of good, a lesser good is

¹⁶ The "internal" contents of (a concept corresponding to) a possible world exclude facts about its comparative status with respect to other worlds. See in this connection Adams 1982, pp. 246–248.

¹⁷ The major texts are in *Essais de Théodicée*, paras. 45, 201 (Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, pp. 127–128, 236–237); *Abrégé de la Controverse réduite à des Argumens en forme*, obj. 8 (Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, pp. 385–387); and Leibniz's fifth paper to Clarke, paras. 7–10, 76 (Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 7, pp. 390–391, 409).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Lovejoy 1936, pp. 173–174.

likewise a kind of evil if it places an obstacle to a greater good: and there would be something to reprove in the actions of God if there had been a way of doing better.”¹⁹

What is most troublesome about this approach is that moral necessity *qua* unthinkability seems to get promoted to logical necessity in the case of God. If God’s choosing optimally flows from his nature, then, even though he was not duty-bound, he cannot have chosen suboptimally *without ceasing to be God*, which is impossible. Yet Leibniz regards God’s choice of the best possible world as free; in fact, it is the expression of a perfectly free will. Leibniz’s conception of freedom falls into a family, some of whose other prominent members include the opinions of Plato, Saint Anselm, Kant, and Hegel. The family resemblance resides in the notion that to act freely is to act rationally, with the corollary that insofar as an action is not validated by reason, it is unfree.²⁰ Leibniz’s conception is that perfect freedom would be manifested in a being whose will is subservient to a rational faculty that in itself is cognitively perfect, ignorant about nothing and subject to no mistakes. Such freedom is approximated by the good angels and the souls in bliss and achieved by God, even though it is characteristic of all these beings that they are less and less able to choose anything but the optimal outcome. It is a distinctive but disturbing consequence of this general conception of freedom that in the case of God, at least, an action can be both necessitated and free.

It is not hard to find criticisms of Leibnizian optimism. Voltaire made the character of Pangloss in *Candide* look foolish by having him continually aver, in the teeth of all sorts of moral evil, that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. And even if, as Alexander Pope maintained, all partial evil is universal good, it is not clear that theists need or want to enlist Leibniz’s aid.²¹ Leibniz has some defenses against these and other objections. It will deepen our understanding of his views if we examine some of the contentious areas.

The idea that some possible worlds are equal in value might seem to run contrary to two other features of Leibniz’s philosophy, his Principle of Continuity and his denial of situations of rational equipoise.

When Leibniz discusses the Principle of Continuity, he typically illustrates it with examples that involve a linear ordering along a single dimension of change. For example, as one moves the second focus of an ellipse farther and farther away from the first focus, one generates a family of elongated ellipses,

¹⁹ *Essais de Théodicée*, para. 8; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, p. 107. See also *Discourse on Metaphysics*, sec. 3 (Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 4, pp. 428–429).

²⁰ I have discussed this notion of freedom somewhat more fully in Mann 1988.

²¹ See Adams 1972.

subsequent members of which come asymptotically close to a parabola. It is a presupposition of this sort of example that no two ellipses could occupy the same position in the sequence of ellipses. When Leibniz applies the Principle of Continuity to hierarchies in nature, they form the same kind of linear ordering.

I think, therefore, that I have good reason for believing that all the different classes of being, whose union forms the universe, exist in the ideas of God (who has distinct knowledge of their essential gradations) only as so many ordinates of a single curve, where the totality of these ordinates does not allow the insertion of any others because that would indicate disorder and imperfection. Men are connected with the animals, these with the plants, and these again with the fossils, which will be connected in their turn with bodies that the senses and the imagination represent to us as perfectly dead and shapeless. Now, since the Principle of Continuity requires that, as the essential determinations of one being approach those of another, so all the properties of the former must gradually approach those of the latter, it is necessary that all the orders of natural beings form a single chain in which the different classes, like links, connect so closely the one to the other that it is impossible for the senses and the imagination to fix the precise point where any one begins or ends; all the species which border on or which occupy, so to speak, the regions of inflection and retrogression (of the curve) have to be equivocal and endowed with characters which belong to the neighboring species equally.²²

One might have expected, then, that the possible worlds would also be “only so many ordinates of a single curve.”

It is important to distinguish between what is essential to Leibniz's Principle of Continuity and what is solely an artifact of his illustrations of it. As a principle of change, the Principle of Continuity maintains that all changes are smooth, *legato*, continuous: as Leibniz puts it on several occasions, there are no leaps in nature. As a principle of order, it maintains that phenomena that admit of degrees of intensity have continua that are *dense*; that is, between any two instances of the phenomenon in question, there is a third instance,

²² Translation in Mates 1986, p. 147. The original text is printed in Guhrauer 1846, vol. 2, p. 32, which I have not been able to consult. A translation of a longer excerpt containing the text is contained in Leibni[t]z 1896, pp. 712–714. See also Lovejoy 1936, pp. 144–145; and, for what appears to be the same text in a different context, Leibni[t]z 1951, pp. 184–188.

intermediate in intensity. Applied thus to the realm of possible worlds, the Principle of Continuity gives us this:

Continuity. For any possible worlds, w and u , if w is better than u , then there is a world, v , such that w is better than v and v is better than u .

The pyramid imagery that Leibniz invokes at the end of the essays on theodicy is compatible with this conception of continuity, since this conception does not rule out the possibility of there being two or more worlds of equal value. Continuity in itself does not impose a strict linear hierarchy on a degreed phenomenon. The illusion that it does is encouraged by the use of examples—the locus of points constituting a line or the conic sections generated by the rotation of a plane through a cone—in which the linear hierarchy is induced by properties of the example independent of its continuity.

However, the supposition that there are two or more worlds of equal value seems to run afoul of Leibniz's repeated denial of the possibility of "indifference of equipoise"; that is, his denial of genuine cases of choice in which there is no reason to choose one alternative over the other. If there were two worlds equal in value, then God would have no reason to create the one over the other. Under those circumstances, he would create neither world.²³ "A perfect indifference is a chimerical or incomplete supposition," Leibniz says at one point, taking it to be ruled out by the Principle of Sufficient Reason.²⁴ Any alleged case of choice in a situation of equipoise is always incompletely understood or incompletely specified: there is always a reason or cause that tips the balance in favor of one alternative, even though the reason or cause be unknown to us.²⁵ There cannot be cases like Buridan's ass, who, situated equidistant between two bales of hay, dies of starvation. For if the universe were divided by a plane bisecting the ass, the two half-universes would not be exactly the same (*sic!*).²⁶ In reply to Samuel Clarke's assertion that God could make two cubes of matter, perfectly equal and alike, and then arbitrarily assign them to different spatial locations, Leibniz says:

The resolutions of God are never abstract and imperfect, as if God decreed first to create the two cubes, and then decreed separately where to put them. Men, limited as they are, are capable of proceeding

²³ "When two incompatible things are equally good, and both in themselves and in their combination with other things, the one has no advantage over the other, God will not produce either of them" (Leibniz's fourth paper to Clarke, para. 19; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 7, p. 374).

²⁴ Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 2, pp. 56–57.

²⁵ *Essais de Théodicée*, paras. 35, 46; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, pp. 122–123,

²⁶ *Essais de Théodicée*, para. 49; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, pp. 129–130.

thus: they resolve upon some thing, and then they find themselves perplexed about the means, about the ways, about the places, about the circumstances. God never takes a resolution about the ends without taking [a resolution] at the same time about the means and all the circumstances. And I have even shown, in the *Theodicy*, that properly speaking, there is only a single decree for the universe in its entirety, through which he has resolved to admit it from possibility to existence. Thus God will not choose a cube without choosing its place at the same time, and he will never choose between indiscernibles.²⁷

It is possible to save the letter of Leibniz's views if not the spirit. The pyramid imagery implies that there are possible worlds that are equal in value. God would have no reason to choose one over the other. However, all the worlds that are equal in value to some other worlds are *suboptimal*. Even if God had no reason to choose among the members of a family of equal rank, the question of his choosing under those circumstances is made nugatory by the fact that for any of these suboptimal worlds, there is a better world that could be chosen. What is important to Leibniz's vision is that the best possible world is unique: there is no room at the apex for two or more worlds.

Why should we think that the Maximality condition could be true; that is, that it could be the case that there is a best possible world?²⁸ Might it not be that for any world whatsoever, there is a greater, ad infinitum? At times Leibniz espouses what seems to be a hard-line response. If there were no best possible world, God would not have had sufficient reason to create anything, and so he would not have created anything. But he did create something; therefore, what he created is the best.²⁹

The ingredients are in place, however, for a more positive answer. Leibniz claims that "the best possible world" is unlike "the perfect creature."³⁰ The former but not the latter has an *intrinsic maximum*. A phenomenon that admits of degrees has an intrinsic maximum if and only if the phenomenon has some degree that *cannot* be surpassed. Given Kripke-like views about the necessary connection between heat and molecular motion, it follows that coldness has an intrinsic maximum—the complete absence of molecular motion—but (as far as I know) heat does not. What seems to be crucial in the identification of cases of intrinsic maxima is that there be some way of specifying the maximum

²⁷ Leibniz's fifth paper to Clarke, para. 66; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 7, p. 407. The reference to the *Essais de Théodicée* appears to be to vol. 6, pp. 147–148 (para. 84).

²⁸ See in this connection Kretzmann 1991.

²⁹ *Essais de Théodicée*, paras. 8, 195–196, 226; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, pp. 107, 232–233, 252–253. See Blumenfeld 1975.

³⁰ *Essais de Théodicée*, para. 195; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, p. 232.

other than saying “the degree such that no greater degree is possible.” In the first section of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* Leibniz asserts, in effect, without providing such a specification, that omniscience and omnipotence are the intrinsic maxima, respectively, of the degreed phenomena of knowledgeability and power.³¹

I conjecture that Leibniz may have thought that there is an intrinsic maximum to the better-than relation among possible worlds because he thought that the best possible world is the maximal expression of two dimensions. It is “the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena.”³² If this is what Leibniz had in mind, then it is incumbent on him to do two things. He must give grounds for believing that simplicity of hypotheses and richness of phenomena are themselves notions that have intrinsic maxima and that they can be maximized simultaneously; that is, that the maximization of one does not entail the diminishment of the other. Leibniz attempts to address the latter issue³³ but, to the best of my knowledge, not the former.

I have tried to convey a sympathetic picture of Leibniz’s views because I think that some criticisms of them miss the mark. As any shrewd voluntarist would tell you, the real problems lie deeper.

III. Incommensurability and Simplicity

Voluntarists would object to two central features of Leibniz’s picture. To say that possible worlds have *any* value ranking—let alone a *complete* one—prior to and independent of God’s choice is to reject the claim that God’s will is utterly sovereign over the realm of value. And to say that God’s choice is determined by his knowing which world is optimal is just to say that his will is *determined*; the attempt to subsume freedom under rational optimality cannot blink that fact. Leibniz depicts God as a big spender in the bazaar of possible worlds. The availability and the prices of the merchandise are beyond his control, and his purchasing behavior is distressingly predictable.

Put that way, of course, Leibniz’s picture is not very attractive. But then neither was the portrait of the willful tyrant offered by the voluntarists. So the choice between voluntarist and rationalist can seem to be Hobson’s choice.

³¹ Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 4, p. 427. See Mann 1975 for a defense of the claim that the divine attributes have intrinsic maxima.

³² *Discourse on Metaphysics*, sec. 6; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 4, p. 431. See also *Principes de la Nature et de la Grace, fondés en raison*, para. 10; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, p. 603.

³³ See *Essais de Théodicée*, para. 208; Leibniz 1875–1890, vol. 6, p. 241.

Where the fourteenth-century Franciscans see a desert landscape of equally valueless possible worlds in the absence of God's will, Leibniz discerns a pyramid structured by the Seriality, Maximality, and Comparability conditions on the better-than relation. We need not accept either alternative. I wish to sketch one among many other accounts that might be given. Against the voluntarists, the account maintains that there are necessary substantive conditions on the better-than relation as it applies to possible worlds. Against Leibniz, it denies one of the substantive conditions he favors; namely, Comparability. Recall that Comparability is the thesis that for any two possible worlds, either the one is better than the other or vice versa or the two are equal in value. Comparability may seem to be more secure than either Seriality or Maximality, but it is important to see what happens if one denies it. Comparability is false if there are pairs of worlds such that the better-than relation does not order them: neither is the one better than the other nor are they equal in value. Let us call such worlds *incommensurable*. So Comparability is false if there are incommensurable possible worlds.³⁴

It would be more plausible to believe that some possible worlds are incommensurable if it is plausible to believe that the actual world is, so to speak, incommensurable with itself; that is, if there are incommensurable values in the actual world. The adage about apples and oranges can be construed as an expression of such a belief, but a deflationary interpretation of the adage would have it that our predicament is merely epistemological: it is just very hard to make the right value discriminations between apples and oranges. I want to consider another kind of example, one that will tell in favor, I hope, of genuine incommensurability over epistemological uncertainty.

Suppose that Teresa is torn between two callings. She is a very talented soprano whose voice could enrich the operatic world. She also believes that the dying poor have a claim on all her energies. She perceives that she is not able to pursue both callings; she can follow one wholeheartedly only to the detriment of the other. She could pursue the operatic career and dedicate her earnings to a hospice, but that in itself would be to decide in favor of the one calling over the other. She could decide to follow the operatic career until she is fifty and then devote the remainder of her life to the dying poor. So to decide, however, will only compound the problem that may trouble Teresa the most. Which calling should she follow, the operatic career, the vocation of caring for the dying poor, or the mixed sequential life?

It redounds to Teresa's credit that she should anguish about the decision. I suggest that it misdiagnoses and oversimplifies her plight to describe it as

³⁴ A fortiori, incommensurability among possible worlds will falsify connectivity, the stronger condition that orders possible worlds in a chain rather than a pyramid.

induced by lack of knowledge about which kind of life is really better. There is something fantastic to the claim that following the operatic career is better than living the life of caring for the dying poor or even the more modest claim that *Teresa's* following an operatic career is better than her caring for the dying poor. But there is something equally fantastic about the reverse ranking or the claim that the two callings are exactly equal in value. The fantasy resides not so much in one's pretending to know what one does not know as it does in one's thinking that there is a correct answer to the question "Which life is the best life to live?" or even to the question "Which life is the best life for Teresa to live?" To deny the appropriateness of the question is not to deny that Teresa can make mistakes about the decision. She may believe wrongly that she will have the courage and perseverance to live out whichever life she chooses, or she may believe mistakenly that she will be unhappy and regretful no matter which choice she makes.

One can dig in one's heels and say that there really is a correct answer. Many consequentialists and deontologists will join forces on this point. Some will claim that all apparent incommensurabilities dissolve in the universal solvent of the Principle of Utility. Others will appeal to a detailed schedule of rank-ordered duties that they allege to discover attached to the Categorical Imperative. And there are still others. I cannot prove that they are wrong, but I am not thereby obliged to agree with them. Nor in denying what they assert am I thereby committed to holding that there is never a correct answer in related cases. I think that there is a correct answer to the choice between a life of caring for the dying poor and a life single-mindedly devoted to becoming a champion crossword puzzle solver.

Consider now two possible worlds. We may suppose that they are identical in their histories up to the time at which Teresa makes her decision. In one of them—call it the Opera World—she decides to pursue the operatic career, and she becomes one of the outstanding sopranos of her generation. In the other—the Hospice World—she decides to care for the dying poor; her life sets an inspirational example. Suppose that the two worlds are as similar in their subsequent histories as they can be, consistent with Teresa's different choices. (There are other possible worlds corresponding to other scenarios.) Must it be the case that one of them is better than the other or that they are equal in value?

I want to suggest that it is plausible to think that the Opera World and the Hospice World are incommensurable with each other. Perhaps the most tempting alternative to incommensurability, given the similarity of the two worlds, would be to say that they are equal in value. But that alternative is implausible. For to say that they are equal in value is to ignore or deny the anguish and the momentousness attached to Teresa's decision. Moreover, consider a

third possible world, the Opera-Plus-*Tosca* World, which is maximally like the Opera World except that in the Opera-Plus-*Tosca* World, Teresa gives one more performance of *Tosca* than she gives in the Opera World. It seems clear that *ceteris paribus*, the Opera-Plus-*Tosca* World is better than (and thus commensurable with) the Opera World. If the Opera World and the Hospice World were equal in value, then it would follow that the Opera-Plus-*Tosca* World is better than the Hospice World. But that seems absurd: imagine someone saying “If only Teresa had given one more performance, she would have vindicated her choice of career.” A natural inclination is to say in reply that no number of additional performances would make a difference, not because the performances are worthless, but rather because the value they have is categorically different from the value realized in caring for the dying poor.³⁵

Instead of desert landscapes or pyramids, think of possible worlds as falling into clusters. *Within* each cluster Comparability holds; each world is either better than or worse than or equal in value to every other world in the cluster. (This kind of comparability within a cluster is compatible with the individual worlds’ having *internal* incommensurable values.) So, for example, the Opera World and the Opera-Plus-*Tosca* World are within the same cluster. *Between* any two clusters Comparability does not hold. The Opera World and the Hospice World are in two such clusters. Not even an omniscient being can rank two worlds from two different clusters, for there is nothing on which to base the ranking.³⁶

The idea that possible worlds fall into partitioned clusters is not apt to win Leibniz’s assent. As we have seen, the Principle of Sufficient Reason is already haunted by the specter of possible worlds in rational equipoise, whose exorcism comes about through their being suboptimal. The denial of Comparability poses an even greater threat. For let us suppose that either the Opera World or the Hospice World (it makes no difference which) is the actual world. The actual world, according to Leibniz, is the best of all possible worlds. We would expect the actual world to be better than all other possible worlds. But if the actual world is the Opera World, then it is *not* better than the Hospice World, not because it is tied with the Hospice World, but because the better-than

³⁵ For further discussion of incommensurability, see “The Fragmentation of Value” in Nagel 1979, pp. 128–141; Griffin 1986, pp. 75–92; and Raz 1986, pp. 321–366.

³⁶ Possible-worlds semantics for modal logic distinguishes several modal systems by means of the formal properties of the *world-accessibility* relation. For example, in a system as strong as S5 the world-accessibility relation is reflexive, symmetric, and transitive. Even so, the relation is not connected in S5. There could be partitioned equivalence classes of possible worlds. Within each such class every world would be accessible to every other world, but between any two such classes the world-accessibility relation would not hold. See Hughes and Cresswell 1968, p. 67, n. 39; and Forbes 1985, pp. 14–15.

relation is not defined between the two worlds. (Parallel remarks hold in the case in which the actual world is the Hospice World.) At the most, the actual world could only be the best possible world in the cluster of worlds to which it belongs. It might be that the Opera World and the Hospice World are optimal members of their respective clusters, but if they are incommensurable, what reason could God have for choosing to create the one over the other? It would have to be either on rational grounds other than betterness or on no grounds at all. The latter alternative would horrify Leibniz. So would the former, since Leibniz ties the notion of betterness so closely to the notion of rationality of choice. But *pace* Leibniz, sometimes the rational thing to do is choose randomly, especially in cases of equipoise or incommensurability.³⁷

Consider the following argument on behalf of Leibniz. It is possible for *A* to be commensurable with *B* and with *C* even though *B* and *C* are incommensurable with each other. Apples and oranges may be mutually incommensurable, but they are both better than (and thus commensurable with) persimmons. Possible worlds might fall into partitioned clusters, but the best of all possible worlds would be a world better than (and thus commensurable with) every other world in every cluster. The best possible world is, after all, the world richest in phenomena. What better sign of its richness than that it be so full of so many goods that it is a candidate—in fact, a winner—in every cluster of worlds of incommensurable goods?

It follows on this argument that neither the Opera World nor the Hospice World can be the best of all possible worlds, since they are incommensurable with each other, whereas the best possible world must be commensurable with every other world. The consequence of this observation, suitably generalized, is that if anyone is ever confronted with a choice between incompatible and incommensurable alternatives, then the world is not the best possible. Since Leibniz is committed to the view that this world is the best possible, it follows that no one is ever confronted with a choice between alternatives that are both incompatible and incommensurable. People like Teresa are often confronted with incompatible alternatives. In every such case, then, the alternatives must be commensurable. Thus the Opera World and the Hospice World are commensurable after all. In short, the argument works only by smuggling Comparability back in. Incommensurability is the bane of Leibniz's ideal of God as the great, rational optimizer.

The picture of possible worlds forming clusters is no more pleasing to voluntarists than it is to Leibniz. A thesis about the incommensurability of some possible worlds is quite different from the voluntaristic thesis that possible worlds are valueless apart from God's will. Moreover, given the ways in which

³⁷ See Mann 1988.

the identities of possible worlds are fixed, it seems clear that if the Opera-Plus-*Tosca* World is better than the Opera World, it is necessarily better and that if the Opera World and the Hospice World are incommensurable, then they are necessarily incommensurable. If these are necessary truths, then it seems that not even God could have altered them. Ockhamite voluntarists would object to these claims by denying that there are any necessary truths about values. Cartesian voluntarists could allow for the existence of such necessary truths and insist that nevertheless God could have altered them.

There is a third alternative that attempts to capture what is tempting about voluntarism and its rival, objectivism, regarding the status of necessary truths. It maintains that there are necessary truths, including necessary truths about values, that God could not have altered them, but that even so, God's will is causally responsible for them. A being can be causally responsible for something that that being could not have avoided. But in such a case, one might protest, the being does not act freely. So it is natural to assume that the third alternative avoids Ockhamite and Cartesian voluntarism only by denying complete freedom to God, thus curtailing God's sovereignty. On the other hand, objectivists will suspect that if God's will is responsible for the necessary truths, then they are not genuinely necessary. Both assumptions, I suggest, are premature.

In insisting on the primacy of God's will, voluntarists portray God's will as primordial, conditioned by nothing, having no content necessary to it, capable of flailing out in any direction it chooses, setting up all the rules, including, according to Descartes, the rules of logic. In contrast, Leibniz's depiction of God's creative choice depends on a will that is constrained by the dictates of divine reason, which in turn is constrained by the structure of the possible worlds. In both cases, God's will and God's reason or understanding are conceived of as separate faculties or modules of the divine mind. The disagreement then centers on which faculty takes precedence over the other. We have seen that the effect of proposition 163 in the *Condemnation of 1277* was to issue a license to voluntarists.

It is hard to resist the speculation that the condemnation of proposition 163 was directed against Saint Thomas Aquinas,³⁸ although Aquinas' discussion of the relation between human intellect and will is more complex than the doctrine condemned in proposition 163.³⁹ In applying itself to will versus intellect in general, however, proposition 163 obliterates a distinction that is crucial to Aquinas's thought. Divine intellect and will are related very differently from the way in which human intellect and will are related.

³⁸ See Wippel 1977, pp. 192–193, n. 54.

³⁹ See *ST*, Ia.82.3–4; Aquinas 1980, p. 305.

In us, in whom power and essence are distinct from will and intellect, and intellect in turn distinct from wisdom, and will distinct from justice, something can be in [our] power that cannot be in a just will or in a wise intellect. But in God power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are the same. Whence nothing can be in the divine power that cannot be in his just will and in his wise intellect.⁴⁰

Humans are constituted in such a way that their wills are distinct from their intellects, but in God, will and intellect are identical. Aquinas relies here on the doctrine of God's *simplicity*, which maintains that God has no parts or components of any kind. The doctrine makes for tough metaphysical sledding.⁴¹ But if, as I think, it is a defensible doctrine, then it has a striking application in the present context. From Aquinas's point of view, asking the question "Which takes priority, God's will or God's intellect?" is like asking the question "Which is larger, $2 + 2$ or 4 ?" "The will of God" and "the intellect of God" do not refer to two separate faculties in God. They are rather two ways of referring to the same divine activity, picking out, from our point of view, two aspects of that activity. If we wish to stress the sovereign, independent, creative aspect of God's activity, then it is appropriate to describe it as his willing or commanding. If we wish to point to the wisdom of God's activity, then it is appropriate to refer to it as his knowing or directing.⁴²

Voluntarists and rationalists are thus engaged in a debate that presupposes something that Aquinas would deny. The divine activity that constitutes the creation of this world is an expression of a perfectly sovereign will and a perfectly wise intellect or—what amounts to the same thing—a perfectly sovereign intellect and a perfectly wise will. Aquinas's appeal to simplicity, in addition to sidestepping the deadlock between voluntarist and rationalist, also helps to make sense of the third alternative concerning the relation between God and the necessary truths. God cannot have willed (or have known) otherwise than that $2 + 2 = 4$: that is entailed by the fact that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is necessary. But that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is itself necessary depends on God's willing (or knowing) it to be necessary. " $2 + 2 = 4$ " has no status independently of God's willing (or knowing) activity and does not impose any external constraint on that activity. " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is part of the expressive content of a perfectly wise will, as are all the other necessary truths. The fact that God cannot have willed (or have known) otherwise than that $2 + 2 = 4$ poses no threat to his freedom. On the doctrine of divine simplicity, the activity by which God wills (or knows) that

⁴⁰ *ST*, Ia.25.5 *ad* 1; Aquinas 1980, p. 226.

⁴¹ For further discussion of it, see Mann 1982, Morris 1985, and Mann 1986.

⁴² *ST*, Ia.25.5 *ad* 1; Aquinas 1980, p. 226.

$2 + 2 = 4$ is identical with God's nature or essence. Thus his not willing (or knowing) that $2 + 2 = 4$ would be tantamount to his not willing (or knowing) himself as a perfectly sovereign, omniscient being. *Pace* the Cartesians, not even God can do that. Why not? Not because of some constraint from a realm of implacable necessary truths outside the will (or knowledge) of God, but rather simply because God is his willing (or knowing) himself, which is his willing (or knowing) his nature and all its entailments.

Cartesian voluntarists seek to exalt the sovereignty of God by claiming either that there are no necessary truths to bind him or that there are no *necessarily* necessary truths.⁴³ One cannot show that their view is contradictory, for any such attempt will rely on principles of inference and modality that Cartesians will insist beg the question. One can show, however, in Oscar Wilde fashion, that the Cartesian view is not naughty but *boring*. Suppose one says that if their view is true, then there is something that God cannot do, namely, institute a realm of necessary truths (or necessarily necessary truths; no harm is done if we ignore this variation from now on). The best he can do is determine a realm of contingent truths. Cartesians will respond that it is not that God *cannot* institute necessary truths; it is just that he *does* not. Now the ennui begins to set in. Consider the claim that God does not institute any necessary truths: is the claim itself necessarily true or contingently true? If it is necessarily true, then, contrary to what the Cartesians advertised, there is at least one necessary truth; moreover, one that says of itself that it was not instituted by God. Is the claim then contingently true? If it is, then God could have instituted necessary truths: to deny this would be to revert to the position that the claim in question is, after all, necessarily true. So the Cartesian position is that God chose to create a world in which there are no necessary truths instead of a world in which there are necessary truths. If we ask the question why, we will be told, I presume, that God had no reason or that if he did, we do not know what it is. We might ask the question why it *seems* to us that there are necessary truths, hinting along the way that God is, on this Cartesian account, guilty of deception. Wily Cartesians have the resources to answer this question. And in a pinch there is always a final trump card that they can play. They can claim that it may be that the actual world has no necessary truths and has all sorts of necessary truths at the same time, citing with approval Emerson's bon mot that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. The important point is that although Cartesians can say all this and more—what, by their lights, could they be *debarred* from saying?—we are not obligated to believe them, especially since we have an account of

⁴³ This distinction is not merely verbal. See Mann 1989 and the references cited therein for further discussion of it. The distinction makes no difference to my present argument.

God's sovereignty vis-à-vis the necessary truths that does not lead to Cartesian excess.

If the ability to institute genuinely necessary truths is a part of God's sovereignty, then we should not be surprised to find that there are necessary truths about goodness, badness, and betterness. That happiness is good, that hatred of God is bad, and that some values are incommensurable with others are surely all candidates. If God is simple and if there are possible worlds that are necessarily incommensurable, that fact will necessarily be known and willed by God. Voluntarists will be mistaken in assuming that God's will has priority over his intellect and that God could have willed just any constellation of values to be good. Leibniz will be mistaken in assuming that God's intellect has priority over his will, that there must be a best of all possible worlds, and that we live in it. Genesis 1:31 says that the world God created was very good, not that it is the best.⁴⁴

[Appendix]

[Vital du Four, *Quaestionum de rerum principio*, Question 4, article 1, section 3, translated from the text in Du Four 1891, p. 307:]

God does not act from the necessity of will, as Avicenna says: that is, [in such a way] that knowledge comprehends a better way of producing, but the right and perfect will, with at least the necessity of immutability, always adheres to reason and knowledge; and through that the will of God immutably wills to produce things according to the better way that his knowledge perceives.

On the contrary, whenever the will or another power is moved per se toward some formal object, having a necessary relation (*habitudinem*) to that thing, then it is moved necessarily toward those things that have an essential relation to that object, and it is not moved necessarily toward those things that have an accidental relation (*ordinem*) to that object. For example, our intellect, perceiving the natural truth of certain first principles, naturally perceives the conclusions that are necessarily drawn from them, but not those that have an accidental relation, or [are related] contingently, to those principles.

This is evident in men who are able to sense (*in viribus sensitivis*), since [the senses] naturally perceive those things that are essentially connected to the

⁴⁴ I thank Scott MacDonald and Derk Pereboom for comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Support for research was provided by a University of Vermont Summer Research Fellowship for 1988 and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for College Teachers and Independent Scholars for 1988–1989, hereby gratefully acknowledged.

proper objects at the same time as [they perceive] the objects. So touch, in sensing what is warm, at the same time perceives what is lukewarm. But they do not perceive at the same time what is accidentally connected; so if what is warm is white or sweet, they do not perceive those.

Wherefore since the will of God is not moved per se except to an adequate good, which is his goodness, it is not moved necessarily to what it wills, except for all those divine and solely intrinsic qualities that are essentially connected to his goodness. But every creature has an accidental relation to the goodness of God, because nothing is added to his goodness from them, just as a point adds nothing to a line. Thus with no necessity does he will something extrinsic. He does nothing except insofar as he wills and just as he wills; thus he makes or produces nothing extrinsic of necessity.

Bibliography

- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1972. "Must God Create the Best?" *Philosophical Review* 81: 317–332. Rpt. in Robert Merrihew Adams 1987, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, 51–64. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1982. "Leibniz's Theories of Contingency." In *Leibniz: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. Michael Hooker. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1987. *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Adams, Marilyn McCord. 1987. *William Ockham*. 2 vols. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1980. *Summa theologiae*. In *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, ed. Robert Busa. Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog.
- Blumenberg, Hans. 1983. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Trans. Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Blumenfeld, David. 1975. "Is the Best Possible World Possible?" *Philosophical Review* 84: 163–177.
- Cassirer, Ernst, Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall Jr., eds. 1948. *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Denifle, Henricus, and Aemilio Chatelain, eds. 1889. *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, vol. 1. Paris: Delalain.
- Descartes, René. 1904. *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*. In *Oeuvres de Descartes*, vol. 7, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery. Paris: Léopold Cerf.
- Dick, Steven J. 1982. *Plurality of Worlds*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dijksterhuis, E. J. 1961. *The Mechanization of the World Picture*. Trans. C. Dikshoorn. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Rpt. 1986. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Du Four, Vital. 1891. *De Rerum Principio: Joannis Duns Scoti . . . Opera Omnia*, vol. 4. Paris: Vivès.
- Forbes, Graeme. 1985. *The Metaphysics of Modality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Funkenstein, Amos. 1986. *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Grant, Edward. 1971. *Physical Science in the Middle Ages*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Grant, Edward, ed. 1974. *A Source Book in Medieval Science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Grant, Edward. 1982. "The Effect of the Condemnation of 1277." In *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Kretzmann et al., 537–539. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Griffin, James. 1986. *Well-Being*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Guhrauer, G. E. 1846. *Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz: Eine Biographie*. 2 vols. Breslau. Rpt. 1966. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
- Hughes, G. E., and M. J. Cresswell. 1968. *An Introduction to Modal Logic*. London: Methuen.
- Korolec, J. B. 1982. "Free Will and Free Choice." In *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Kretzmann et al., 629–641.
- Kretzmann, Norman. 1991. "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Kretzmann, Norman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, eds. 1982. *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leibni[t]z, Gottfried Wilhelm. 1875–1890. *Die Philosophischen Schriften*. 7 vols. Ed. C. I. Gerhardt. Berlin: Weidmann. Rpt. 1965. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. 1896. *New Essays concerning Human Understanding*. Trans. Alfred Gideon Langley. New York: Macmillan.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. 1951. *Leibniz: Selections*. Ed. Philip P. Wiener. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Lewis, David. 1986. *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Lovejoy, Arthur O. 1936. *The Great Chain of Being*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mann, William E. 1975. "The Divine Attributes." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12: 151–159. Reprinted as Chapter 1 of this volume.
- Mann, William E. 1982. "Divine Simplicity." *Religious Studies* 18: 451–471. Reprinted as Chapter 2 of this volume.
- Mann, William E. 1986. "Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris." *Religious Studies* 22: 343–353.
- Mann, William E. 1988. "God's Freedom, Human Freedom, and God's Responsibility for Sin." In *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Reprinted as Chapter 10 of this volume.
- Mates, Benson. 1986. *The Philosophy of Leibniz*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morris, Thomas V. 1985. "On God and Mann: A View of Divine Simplicity." *Religious Studies* 21: 299–318.
- Murdoch, John E. 1982. "Infinity and Continuity." In *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Kretzmann et al., 564–592.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1979. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ockham, William. 1970. *Scriptum in Librum Primum Sententiarum Ordinatio: Distinctiones II–III*. Ed. Stephanus (Stephen) Brown. In *Guillelmi de Ockham Opera Theologica*, vol. 2. St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University.
- Ockham, William. 1981. *Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum (Reportatio)*. Ed. Gedeon Gál and Rega Wood. In *Guillelmi de Ockham Opera Theologica*, vol. 5. St. Bonaventure, NY: St. Bonaventure University.
- Raz, Joseph. 1986. *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stalnaker, Robert. 1976. "Possible Worlds." *Noûs* 10: 65–75.
- Wippel, John F. 1977. "The Condemnations of 1270 and 1277 at Paris." *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7: 169–201.

SECTION III

MORALITY

Theism and the Foundations of Ethics

A normative ethical theory is a theory that tells us what is right and what is wrong. Somewhat more fully and precisely, a normative ethical theory specifies what is obligatory, what is forbidden, and what is permissible and why. We do not suffer from the lack of normative theories. There are deontological theories, consequentialistic theories, perfectionistic theories, and more. (For a contemporary sampling, see LaFollette 2000.)

Among those theories one will find examples putatively based on various religious traditions. Contemporary philosophers have tended, for the most part, to look askance at such theories. Set aside for the moment those religious traditions, like austere versions of Buddhism, that depend on no gods. One source of philosophical antipathy towards normative theories based on theistic grounds is an argument that has its roots in Plato's *Euthyphro*. Supposing that the religious tradition in question is monotheistic, we can ask whether something is obligatory, for example, because God declares it to be obligatory or whether God declares it to be obligatory because it is obligatory. Choose the first option and you appear committed to the view that whatever God declares as obligatory is obligatory just in virtue of his declaring it so. Had God capriciously declared that torture is obligatory, then torture would henceforward have been obligatory. The first option also appears to carry with it the implication that we are motivated to do what is obligatory out of fear: to transgress a divinely sanctioned obligation is to court divine wrath.

Choose the second option and other unpalatable consequences await you. On the second option the moral economy is already in place independent of God's declarations. Thus if torture is forbidden, then God would be mistaken or lying were he to declare torture permissible or obligatory. So God, even on his best behavior, can function only as an educator and enforcer of a moral order over which he has no legislative control. Education and enforcement are important functions. There is no reason, however, to think that these functions

cannot be discharged successfully by humans. The second option thus assigns no moral role unique to God.

The dilemma generated by these two options must be confronted by those who attempt to base a normative theory on their theistic convictions. In the remainder of this essay I shall sketch a case for one kind of monotheistic normative theory that provides a response to the dilemma. The theory is not one to which every monotheistic ethicist need give assent. It does, however, incorporate many of the features that are central to theism.

I. Constraints on Theory

What should one expect of *any* adequate normative theory? To what extent can a theistic theory meet these expectations? I begin by sketching briefly some criteria in answer to the first question. At the end of this essay I will return even more briefly to the second question.

An adequate normative theory should provide a rationally defensible, systematic, and coherent account or explanation of why the obligatory is obligatory, the forbidden is forbidden, and the permissible is permissible. One would expect that *rational defensibility* entails some fairly substantial universality condition. That is, the theory should specify a normative principle (or set of normative principles) that applies impartially and unexceptionably to all people. Utilitarianism and Kantianism are famously universal. One would also expect that rational defensibility includes some sort of consonance between the normative theory and our pre-theoretical intuitions about many cases. (One such intuition fuels the universality condition; namely, that persons, the primary subjects of concern of normative theory, do not differ from each other just insofar as they are persons.) It may well be that an adequate normative theory leads us to revise some of our judgments about right and wrong. But it is extremely hard to envision the possibility that an adequate normative theory would imply that all or even most of the pre-theoretical intuitions of reasonable, well-informed people were in error. A *systematic* account is one that provides unified justification for normative judgments made about a wide variety of cases. Our pre-theoretical intuitions might form what appears initially to be a laundry list of opinions about right and wrong. It might be that some of the intuitions remain unconnected to the others, even after the application of a normative theory. Nevertheless, an adequate normative theory should show us, in a convincing way, the *simile in multis* among seemingly diverse cases. Unconnected intuitions may then be regarded as a symptom either of an incomplete theory or of an insufficiently integrated set of intuitions. If the former, then the theory needs revision; if the latter, the

intuitions need revision. *Coherence* includes but is not confined to logical consistency among the theory's principles. A normative theory that unequivocally implied that taking a life is always wrong and always not wrong would be incoherent in virtue of being inconsistent. A theory that implied that whenever motorists are driving on the right side of the road, they should shift to the left side and whenever they are driving on the left side, they should shift to the right side may pass the test of logical consistency but is surely incoherent nonetheless.

In addition to the conditions just mentioned, an adequate normative theory should provide agents with a guide to action and judges with criteria for appraisal of agents' performances. A normative theory's action-guiding aspects are prospective, telling an agent what ought to be done or avoided in situations of choice. Appraisal is primarily retrospective, an after-the-fact activity in which the agent or others may engage. Because the agents to whom normative theories are addressed are (or include) humans, an adequate theory must take into account actual human psychology. This requirement entails at a minimum that a theory's action-guiding principles should be *cognitively perspicuous* and connected to human motivational structure. Moral principles so complicated that they could be learned and applied only with great difficulty might be usable in the task of appraisal by a sophisticated judge with time to spare, but they would be virtually useless as a guide to action. But even a simple, easily learned principle can be difficult to apply correctly in making a decision. This point can be illustrated by considering the difference between act- and rule-utilitarianism. Act-utilitarians insist on the applicability of the utilitarian principle directly to individual choice situations: an act is right if and only if no other alternative act available to the agent has better consequences on balance. Rule-utilitarians argue that in many cases, especially cases involving the pressure of time, partial ignorance, and emotional bias, the agent's attempt to apply the utilitarian principle directly to a decision is apt to result in the wrong choice, by the lights of the utilitarian principle itself. Instead we should depict the situation differently. There is a set of succinct moral rules—rules like *Do not lie*, *Keep your promises*, and so on—the following of which tends to produce optimal results in the long run. These are the rules that should guide our action. The utilitarian principle then serves as the principle that validates the set of optimal, succinct moral rules. In sum, the rule-utilitarian claims that this version of utilitarianism pays sufficient respects to the limitations of human cognition. (This is the beginning, not the end, of a debate between act- and rule-utilitarians. For my purposes I need not endorse either side.)

Suppose that we have a normative theory that passes with flying colors the constraints of rational defensibility, systematicity, coherence, and cognitive

perspicuity. Even so, the theory might leave us cold. Suppose the theory says that I ought to do x . Why should I care about doing x ? Different sorts of theories give different sorts of answers. Utilitarians enjoin me to bring about optimal consequences, taking into account everyone affected by my action. But why should I want to act that way, especially in circumstances in which what is optimal for others comes at a cost to me, a cost I can avoid paying by choosing an alternative action? Kantians claim that I should act only on that maxim that I would be willing to see become a universal law of human behavior; that so to act is the expression of complete practical rationality. Why should I care to act in that way? The response that my question is a kind of logical impertinence—asking for a reason for being rational presupposes my acceptance of rationality as dispositive—misses the question's point. The question is not about reasons but about motives. Granted that reason reigns in the realm of rationality, what is supposed to *move* me to act as reason bids? Even if I am not prepared to become an expatriate from the realm, I can assure you that there are occasions when my desires urge me to be a scofflaw. Kantians do not deny the motivational power of desires. They are committed, however, to regarding as irrational every case of a person's acting on desires that are contrary to what reason dictates. Thus the burden on Kantians is to offer an account of practical reason according to which its proper functioning elicits motivation sufficient to eradicate or submerge any desires to the contrary.

The question posed in the previous paragraph expresses the concern that an adequate normative theory be *motivationally realistic*. It is not simply that once one understands the theory, one will see its point; one must in addition find the point attractive. And the "one" in question here must be a human person, fully equipped with the desires, emotions, and foibles to which humans are subject. A normative theory that ignores these conative aspects of human psychology might be an intellectually entertaining edifice, but who could or would want to dwell in it?

Further reflection may lead one to add further constraints on the notion of an adequate normative theory. I suspect, however, that one will not be led to abandon any of the constraints of rational defensibility, systematicity, coherence, cognitive perspicuity, and motivational realism.

II. On Making the Rules

Recall that the second option of the *Euthyphro*-inspired dilemma with which this essay began was the proposition that God declares something to be obligatory because it is obligatory, not vice versa. This option has the consequence that God

plays, at best, a supporting role in our morality play: despite the room the option leaves him as educator and enforcer, he would seem to have delegated the education in and enforcement of moral norms to other, earthly actors. Perhaps the play has a final judgment scene, in which God has the last words to say about our fates. Even so, on the second option God's judgment would only be a matter of holding us accountable to norms of conduct, none of which were of his making. The dilemma's first option ascribes to God a much more central role, but we saw that it also appears to be vulnerable to two objections, one about divine arbitrariness, the other about ignoble human motivation. Nonetheless, I shall attempt a defense of this option, arguing that, properly understood, it has responses to the objections.

Let us express the first option's central thesis vaguely as the thesis that God makes the moral rules. If pressed to be more explicit about what the notion of "making" amounts to here, many theists, past and present, claim that making is achieved by *commanding*. Theists have biblical warrant for adopting this conception. In Exod. 20:1–17 God's revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai consists of 10 commandments: when Moses repeats them in Deut. 5:6–21, he appends to them the so-called Great Commandment—perhaps as supplement, perhaps as a summary—to love God "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). When a lawyer asks Jesus what the Great Commandment is, Jesus recites it and adds that there is a second like it, to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:39). Following this Biblical tradition we might suppose that any normative theory that accepts the thesis that God makes the moral rules is a "divine command theory." I suggest, however, that we not take the phrase too seriously, allowing that it might be both too wide and too narrow. Too wide, because it would be premature to foreclose the possibility that some divine commands are not intended by God to be morally binding. "Let there be light" expresses a command but imposes no obligations. Somewhat more controversially, one might argue that God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son does not make the sacrifice obligatory or even permissible, because God had no intention that Abraham carry out the command. (See Wierenga 1983, p. 390.) Too narrow, because commands properly speaking are but one kind of communicative device speakers can use to direct behavior. (I presuppose that God does communicate with humans: see Wolterstorff 1995.) Included in the family of imperatives are requests, recommendations, warnings, instructions, and invitations. A flexible divine command should allow for the possibility that God might use any of these devices—and for that matter nonimperative devices—to lay moral obligations and prohibitions upon humans. To put it another way, such a theory should be sensitive to the fact that the way in which divine authority makes itself known can vary as

background and context varies. When the scribes and Pharisees ask what should be done with the woman caught in adultery, Jesus says, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). But Jesus and his audience know full well that no member of the crowd is without sin. Thus what appears on the surface as imperatival granting of permission is intended by Jesus and understood by the crowd to be an injunction *not* to stone the woman.

There are philosophers, however, who subscribe to the thesis that God makes the moral rules but who do not accept divine commands as the entities that make the moral rules. Mark Murphy (1998) has recently argued for a view according to which a person's being morally obligated to do something depends on God's *willing* that the person act so, not on God's commanding that the person act so. Two questions are certain to arise here. What is divine willing? How does a will-based theory differ from a command-based theory? On a view like Murphy's, divine commands are the vehicles that *convey* obligations, but they do not *make* the obligations *obligatory*; God's will is responsible for that. It is clear that much rides here on an understanding of the notion of God's willing. For example, one can understand the notion in such a way that it would follow that the will of an omnipotent being is unimpedible; whatever God wills, happens. This notion is too strong for Murphy's purposes. For if God's will makes the moral rules and if God also unimpedibly wills universal compliance with them, then none of us would ever sin. (Murphy makes a similar point, relying alternatively on God's omniscience and rationality. See Murphy 1998, p. 16.) But if God were not to will universal compliance with his rules, then the rules would appear to lack the important characteristic of universality and their promulgator would correspondingly appear to be capricious.

In contrast, a notion of willing as mere desiring is too weak. It seems possible that even an omniscient and perfectly rational being could have conflicting desires. (The desire for A conflicts with the desire for B if the realization of A precludes the realization of B and vice versa.) If divine desires were sufficient to create moral obligations, then conflicting divine desires could easily impose inconsistent obligations, and thus a normative theory based on God's desires alone risks the charge of incoherence.

It could be argued that insofar as he is perfect, God is immune from conflicting desires, so that inconsistent obligations cannot arise in this way. It is not clear, however, how an argument from perfection to absence of conflicting desires is supposed to go. If conflicting desires entail indecisiveness, that might constitute a reason for thinking that a perfect being would not have them. But it is not obvious that indecisiveness is the inevitable outcome of conflicting desires, especially when one desire outweighs the other. One might try to exploit the point about desires having different weights and argue, alternatively,

that conflicts of desires can only arise in agents with incomplete knowledge or defective reasoning abilities: an omniscient and perfectly rational being would see where the weight of reason falls in any situation and desire accordingly. Aside from the fact that this maneuver makes the dubious presupposition that there are no cases in which reason finds two incompatible alternatives in exact rational equipoise, it fails to address the issue at hand. The fact—if it be a fact—that God always tailors his desires to fit the contours of reason does not show that he cannot have conflicting desires. On the contrary, if God's will is exquisitely responsive to reasons, he will, one presumes, see what is attractive, say, about alternative B and to that extent desire B, even if it should happen that reason awards higher marks to alternative A.

Perhaps we need not speculate so extravagantly about divine psychology in order to come up with a defensible conception of will that steers a middle course between the overly strong conception of an unimpedible will and the insufficiently strong conception of a mere wish. Murphy appeals to a medieval distinction between one's antecedent will and one's consequent will (Murphy 1998, p. 18). As a first approximation we can think of the distinction as the difference between what one simply wants and what one wants, all things considered. I simply want a drink from that tall, frosty tumbler of clear liquid. Tell me that it is laced with prussic acid and, all things considered, I will not want the drink. To illustrate the distinction this way might lead one to think that an essential component of the distinction is temporal sequence involving a change of desire: at first I wanted the drink, then I came to believe that it was poisoned, and then I rejected it. But the distinction need neither be sequential nor involve a change of mind. Suppose that someone invites you to play chess. You are a good player and enjoy the challenge of a good competitor. You know nothing about the skill of your opponent. You enjoy winning chess games. But you also want (antecedently) your opponent to play cleverly, even if that should result in your losing. As the game progresses it becomes evident that your opponent is not very skilled. Your desire now (consequently) is to defeat your opponent as quickly as possible so that you may return to reading your novel. Still, you continue to want, somewhat forlornly and against the evidence, your opponent to play well: you value a good game over a good novel but a good novel over a boring game. Your consequent desire has not supplanted your antecedent desire; if anything it may have amplified it. And although your opponent may not be able to thwart your consequent will, to win the game quickly, he is certainly apt to frustrate your antecedent will, that he should play adroitly. (It is important for theological reasons to insist that the antecedent-will/consequent-will distinction need not involve stages of change on the part of the willing agent. Thomas Aquinas, for example, wants to apply the distinction to God's willing activity while also holding that

because God is eternal, there is no successiveness in God's mind. See the passage cited in Murphy 1998, p. 18.)

Murphy proposes to identify the source of moral obligation with God's antecedent will, not God's consequent will. We are to suppose, for example, that it is God's antecedent will that no one commit adultery and that that will makes adultery forbidden. Just as your bootless chess opponent can thwart your antecedent will, so human adulterers can thwart God's. God's consequent will, on the other hand, has the sort of unimpedibility that we would expect of an omniscient, omnipotent being. You will checkmate your opponent no matter what he may do. In similar fashion, we may suppose, God will bring his all-things-considered plans to fruition, no matter what creatures may do.

What rides on the distinction between a divine command theory and a divine will theory? They are species under the same genus and they can be expected to converge in many cases. What difference could it make whether murder is wrong because God's command forbids it or because God's will does? The differences should emerge when we consider cases in which the two theories might part ways. Might there be cases in which God commands something that he does not will? Conversely, might there be cases in which God wills something that he does not command? In either case, which creates the obligation, the command or the will?

We saw earlier that some philosophers have taken the case of God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his son to be an example of the first possibility. (Adams 1999, p. 260 demurs, claiming that "the case it poses should not be taken as a relevant possibility in theistic ethical theory." Adams's rejection seems to be based on epistemological grounds: "[A]ny reason for believing that God does not . . . want us to do something will virtually always be a reason, of approximately equal strength, for believing that God has not commanded us to do it.") Were we to admit the case, the question would remain: is Abraham obligated to sacrifice his son, as the divine command dictates, or to refrain, as the divine will requires? It seems clear that divine command theorists would choose the first option and divine theorists would choose the second.

Robert Adams welcomes the possibility of cases in which God wills something that he does not command. They provide room, within a divine command framework, for supererogatory actions, actions that are "beyond the call of duty," morally praiseworthy yet not morally obligatory (Adams 1999, pp. 260–261). In a straightforward manner Adams's theory can describe supererogatory actions as actions God wants us to perform but does not command.

The situation with divine will theory is not as straightforward. Suppose there are cases in which God wills something but does not command it or reveal it in any other way. If God's antecedent will invariably creates moral

obligations, then it would follow that God's creatures would have obligations for which they are liable, by divine reckoning, yet about which they are completely ignorant. This situation would be deplorable. (I avoid describing the situation as unjust or as a violation of creatures' rights. If injustice and infringement of rights can only arise as a consequence of violations of moral norms created by God, as both divine command theorists and divine will theorists must maintain, the norms themselves cannot be unjust or in violation of anyone's rights.) If a civil authority punished people who acted in ways contrary to the authority's desires, even though the desires had never been publicized, we would regard the authority as tyrannical. If, in order to avoid this possibility, a divine will theorist claims that divinely willed but wholly unexpressed obligations do not or cannot exist, the claim appears to concede too much to divine command theory. If communicative expression is necessary for obligatoriness to take effect, it is hard to see how God's will can play the role advertised by divine will theory. God's will may propose, but it appears as though God's commands would actually dispose.

This quandary is a quandary only for a divine will theory that accepts the proposition that God's antecedent will always creates moral obligations. Philip Quinn has recently argued that divine will theory need not accept the proposition. Quinn's argument is prompted by a desire to accommodate supererogation within a divine will theory, but the distinction Quinn invokes, if it is viable, will also dissolve our putative quandary. Quinn claims, in effect, that God's antecedent will might be at least two-sorted. Quinn suggests that one way to make room for supererogatory actions is to allow that "obligatory actions are actions God both wants us to perform and antecedently intends that we perform, while supererogatory actions are actions God wants us to perform but does not antecedently intend that we perform" (Quinn 2002, p. 461). One can extend Quinn's distinction to dissolve alleged cases of unrevealed obligations by maintaining that some of the actions God wants us to perform may never be revealed but are not obligatory; the obligatory actions are always wanted, intended, *and* publicized by God.

Still, it would be fair to ask why, on this account, the intentional, obligation-creating aspects of God's antecedent will *are* always made known to creatures and to expect an answer that avoids pinning the obligation-creating function on the communicative acts by which God's will is made known. There is, moreover, another worry about Quinn's distinction between antecedent desires and antecedent intentions. A divine antecedent intention that creates an obligation would be an intention that a creature perform an action. Adams notes that "an intention is normally an intention to do something oneself" and that when we speak of an agent intending that someone or something else, *X*, do something, that implies an intention on the agent's part "to do something to

see to it, or at least make it significantly more likely, that *X* will do what was intended" (Adams 2002, p. 484). Desires need not have this agentive feature. Quinn is correct to distinguish intentions from desires, but the worry is that intentions, especially the intentions of an all-knowing, all-powerful being, are too *peremptory* for Quinn's purpose. A rational agent can have conflicting desires. Conflicting intentions, in contrast, betoken agent irrationality. Why so? The answer seems to lie in the fact that an intention is a kind of resolution that something shall be done, a resolution that takes desires as inputs and determines which desires are to be satisfied. A conflict of intentions leaves their author in the unenviable position of being committed to do and to refrain from doing something. (For more on this and other differences between desires and intentions, see Mann 2004.) Applying this to the case of God, I must say that it seems as though if God has antecedent intentions, they are logically posterior to God's antecedent desires. In short, Quinn's divine antecedent intentions appear to be functionally indistinguishable from God's consequent will. In particular, just as God's consequent will is unimpedible, so, it would seem, are his antecedent intentions. If this is so, then when Quinn says that God both wants and antecedently intends that creatures perform certain actions and that God's wanting and intending are what makes the actions obligatory, it follows that no one ever sins. Thus I am inclined to think, pending further clarification from divine will theorists on the connections among God's antecedent will, its communication, and supererogation, that a divine command theory is preferable to a divine will theory.

III. Love

To someone waiting to be convinced that there can be a viable theistic normative theory, the choice between divine command theory and divine will theory can seem quaint at best. Either account must be prepared to respond to these critical issues. First, there is the *feasibility problem*. The content of the commandments that are supposed to be fundamental are to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. What is being commanded here such that it is the sort of thing that can reasonably be commanded? Order me to close the window and I would know how to go about complying immediately. Tell me to translate Aristotle's *Metaphysics* from Greek into Korean and I know what would be required for me to comply, but you had better anticipate a long wait. Now command me to love you or to love someone else. Lovable as you or they may be, I might be unsure about how to take steps to fulfill your command. Love is famously involuntary. Although your command does not formally violate the principle that *ought* implies *can*, love for another particular person may

just be psychologically inaccessible to me. Second, there is the *character problem*. How do commands like these reflect on the personality of the commander? Pleading for another's love can be pathetic, but commanding another's love appears to be pathological, a sign of overbearing arrogance or something worse. Third, there is the *aptness problem*. Why should we *love* God and our neighbors? It certainly might be prudent to hew closely to the line drawn by an omnipotent being, but prudent servitude is not the same thing as love. And being nice to one's neighbors is a good policy to follow, but being nice to them does not require loving them.

One way to handle these problems is to offer a minimalist account of love. According to it, you should not think of the love that is being commanded as a complex emotional state, process, or relationship. Think instead of the two Great Commandments as merely dictating constraints on behavior: we should act as if we loved God and our neighbors. Immanuel Kant heads in this direction vis-à-vis the second Great Commandment: "*Love* is a matter of *feeling*, not of willing, and I cannot love because I *will* to, still less because I *ought* to (I cannot be constrained to love); so a *duty to love* is an absurdity. But *benevolence* (*amor benevolentiae*), as conduct, can be subject to a law of duty" (Kant 1991, p. 203). Perhaps the clearest recent statement of the minimalist account is from André Comte-Sponville: "Only actions can be commanded; therefore the commandment requires not that we love but that we act *as though* we loved—that we do unto our neighbor as we would unto our loved ones, and unto strangers as we would unto ourselves. The commandment prescribes not feelings or emotions, which are not transferable, but actions, which are" (Comte-Sponville 2001, p. 97). The minimalist account resolves the feasibility problem by claiming that what is being commanded is something that can sensibly be commanded; namely, actions, not attitudes. The aptness problem is resolved by maintaining that love is not what is required but rather *as-it-were love*. As for the character problem, the minimalist account can finesse it by maintaining that the Great Commandments are misstated: "You shall love God with all your heart" should really be "You shall act as if you love God with all your heart," and one salient way of doing that is to act as if you love your neighbor as yourself. Understood in this way, the personality of the author of the commandments can be seen to be relatively benign, in fact, downright beneficent, although perhaps with a touch of self-importance or personal insecurity.

But if it would have been so easy to state the commandments correctly, why are they worded as they are? There is the psychological phenomenon that sometimes mimicking a certain kind of attitude leads the mimicker to acquire the attitude. If I want to become brave, Aristotle says, I should act as the brave person acts. More to the point, Smith's feigned concern for Jones's

welfare, initially motivated by greed, if practiced long enough, may ironically ensnare Smith into genuine concern for Jones. The minimalist is poorly served by this phenomenon, for it suggests that love-like behavior towards God and neighbor, even if valuable in its own right, is to be valued primarily as a means to achieving what the Great Commandments overtly demand of us—*love* of God and neighbor. Moreover, the phenomenon undermines the claim that “only actions can be commanded.” Commands can legitimately take attitudes as their object: ask any parent bent on instilling the correct attitudes in their children. It is just that some commands cannot be obeyed directly and immediately. But then neither can your command to me to translate Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. One should not take the difficulty (at least on some occasions) in complying with such commands as a reason for rejecting their feasibility. Within a page of declaring that a duty to love is an absurdity, Kant goes on to say:

So the saying “you ought to love your neighbor as yourself” does not mean that you ought immediately (first) to love him and (afterwards) by means of this love do good to him. It means, rather, do good to your fellow man, and your beneficence will produce love of man in you (as an aptitude of the inclination to beneficence in general). (Kant 1991, p. 203)

The concession deflates much of what he had said earlier.

Thus there is a response to the feasibility problem that does not lead to the minimalist account. But the character and aptness problems remain. Resolution of the character problem would seem to require reflection on the nature of God, more specifically, on God’s personality. Resolution of the aptness problem can hardly proceed without an examination of the notion of love. I propose to begin with the latter project and to interweave the former into it as we proceed.

The philosophical literature on love is immense. Any attempt to survey it adequately would require a book. I propose instead to organize our examination around the fact that classical Greek has three terms all loosely translatable as “love,” *eros*, *philia*, and *agapē*. (For a similar ordering see Comte-Sponville 2001, pp. 222–290.) We should not suppose that the original, common usages of these terms bear the philosophical sophistication that we will see attached to them. The terms were appropriated early on by philosophical and religious traditions to emphasize different features arguably exhibited by the phenomenon of love. Taking them in the order given, *eros*, *philia*, *agapē*, we will see a sort of dialectical escalation of the conditions said to be important to a theistic conception of love.

IV. Eros

Desire—paradigmatically, sexual desire—is central to the notion of *eros*. In the *Symposium* Plato lobbies for a vision of *eros*, chastened by reason, that impresses this otherwise unruly, arational drive into the service of the quest for wisdom. Erotic lovers begin, typically, by loving a particular person's body. Under the tutelage of reason they can come to realize that what they love about a person's body is its beauty. In general, it is a thing's beauty that makes it naturally attractive. Now the beauty of particular bodies is a low-level beauty. Insofar as rational lovers are attracted to beauty and more strongly attracted the more beautiful they realize a thing to be, they will find themselves engaged in a pursuit of higher and still higher orders of beauty (the beauty of souls, well-crafted laws, knowledge), culminating in the Form of Beauty Itself, eternally and perfectly beautiful, the cause of beauty in all other things. Plato provides a complementary vision of the nature and function of the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, according to which the Good both confers truth on things so that they can be known and empowers our souls so that we can acquire knowledge. Although the Good is superior to truth and knowledge (superior, Plato says, in *beauty*) the Good is itself an object of knowledge. The interconnections between the two Forms are so intimate (for example, it is necessarily the case that everything good is beautiful and vice versa) that were it not for Plato's assurance that they are two, one might think they were one and the same. Like Beauty Itself, the Good is an end point of a lover's quest: the lover is a lover of wisdom.

The Form of the Good, then, determines what shall be members of the domain of truths while it enables souls to grasp those truths. Inasmuch as the Good and its works are transcendentally beautiful, they are preeminently attractive and preeminently fitting objects of *eros*. The erotic pursuit of truth and the Good results in the lover's "giving birth in beauty"; that is, producing virtuous works in the lover and in others. So for Plato, *eros*, when harnessed by reason, motivates us to pursue the beauty of truth up to its transcendent font, the Good, and to replicate, insofar as it is in our power, the beauty of goodness in ourselves and others.

An impressive array of traditional theistic themes naturally radiates from this Platonic core when Beauty and the Good are replaced by God. Many theists maintain, for example, that everything that is good is good because it is an image of supremely good God. Many theists maintain further that everything that exists is good to some degree because it has been created by God, from whom no evil can flow. Philosophically minded theists have sometimes described God as the cause of truth, including even—perhaps especially—necessary truth (Mann 2010), and the illuminator of souls, thereby making human understanding possible. It is tempting to assimilate the contemplation

of Beauty Itself into the beatific vision of God, who has been described by some influential theists as Beauty Itself (Sherry 1997). Finally, theists generally agree that genuine love for God can only emanate from a virtuous soul, one inclined, among other things, to love others inasmuch as they are created in God's image.

Adams's *Finite and Infinite Goods* is surely the most ambitious and profound recent attempt to launch a theistic normative theory from a Platonic base. On Adams's conception, as on Plato's, the good is the fundamental evaluative notion. Badness is conceptually parasitic on goodness. The badness of a thing is either a deficiency of or an opposition to the good, not anything that has any independent ontological status (Adams 1999, pp. 102–104). And the normative notions that give rise to networks of obligation, namely, wrongness and rightness, are similarly parasitic on the good but are in addition social in character, specifying what transactions among persons are forbidden (because they oppose the good in some way), permissible (because they are not forbidden), or required (because it is forbidden that they not be done). (Adams 1999, pp. 231–232. It will have occurred to the perceptive reader that, consistent with Adams's divine command theory, the social unit in which obligations can arise can be very small. In the account of creation given in Genesis 2, God commands Adam, before Eve has been created, not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.) The most distinctive feature of the notion of the good that Adams develops is that it is a kind of *excellence*. This feature is not at home in instrumental, utilitarian, well-being, or desire-satisfaction conceptions of the good. (In fact, we are probably most familiar with evaluative excellence in nonmoral domains, such as aesthetics and sports.) But it does comport well with the Platonic conception of *eros* tracking excellence through its images up to its maximal, transcendent source.

It is no part of Plato's or Adams's case that we can fully fathom now all the glory of this transcendent source. Quite the contrary: holiness, divine transcendence, or the Good Itself, as Adams puts it, "screams with the hawk and laughs with the hyenas. We cannot comprehend it. It is fearful to us and in some ways dangerous" (Adams 1999, p. 52). It is enough that we understand that God is supremely good, not what all the entailments of supreme goodness are. This understanding of God allows its believer to reply to the arbitrariness objection to the thesis that God makes the rules. If God is supremely good, his own goodness will prevent him from issuing commands whose obedience would irremediably oppose the good. (Questions can arise here whether God's inability to issue such commands threatens to invalidate his omnipotence or freedom. I think not, but I will not argue the case here.) We can see now one reason Adams has for maintaining that the good is more fundamental than the right. God's commands determine what is right and what is wrong, but God's

commands do not determine what is good, except in the sense that his creative fiat determine what good creatures shall exist.

Love modeled on Platonic *eros* provides its defender with straightforward answers to the aptness and character problems. Recall that the nub of the aptness problem was a request for an explanation for why love is the attitude we should take towards God and our neighbors. We should love God because God is supremely worthy of love. We should love our neighbors because they image the goodness of their creator. The character problem challenged the psychological character of someone who commands another's love. In addition to the general consideration that not all imperatives need be construed as commands, there is the point that it is plausible to believe that God, conceived as supreme goodness, would want to communicate to his creatures the message that their ultimate happiness, a happiness in comparison to which all other conceptions of happiness pale, rests in the beatific vision of the divine.

V. Philia

Despite these affinities between Platonism and theism, there is one striking difference. Plato's Forms of Beauty and the Good richly repay their lovers' labors, but they do not reciprocate their lovers' love. Beauty Itself is far more beautiful than the most exquisite landscape or portrait but every bit as impersonal. Theists insist that God is personal, a being to whom emotions, beliefs, desires, and intentions can be ascribed. More than that, they insist that God can and does love his creatures. The notion of love as *eros* seems ill suited to characterize this love. Plato insists that *eros* entails a need or lack on the part of the lover along with a kind of vulnerability. According to Plato, one cannot love what one already has. The only sense that Plato attaches to the notion of loving what one possesses is that one wants to continue to possess the object of one's love when there is a liability that it can be removed in the future. Plato's gods lack nothing and nothing can be taken away from them; thus they love nothing. Furthermore, if, as Adams maintains, *eros* admires excellence, we need an account of why perfect God would love creatures conspicuous for their lack of excellence.

Adams's analysis of *grace* addresses the sort of concern just expressed. Grace is "love that is not completely explained by the excellence of its object" (Adams 1999, p. 151). It is thus important for Adams that love—even perfectly rational love—be allowed discretionary leeway vis-à-vis the value of its objects. It may be that Mozart's music is superior to Haydn's, but I would not wish to be told that I should always choose to listen to Mozart over Haydn. Still, as the title of Adams's book reminds us, the gap between the goodness of God

and the goodness of creatures is not like the smallish gap between Mozart and Haydn; it is infinite. So we must face the questions, (a) why infinitely good, infinitely self-sufficient, and infinitely competent God would create and sustain us when he could have created better creatures and (b) how it might be that, despite the observation noted in (a), God does love us.

About (a) I shall say little except to report that for all I know, God *has* created beings more excellent than we are. Moreover, *any* finite being that infinitely good God creates will be, not just less excellent than God, but less excellent than *infinitely* many kinds of beings God could create. As for (b), we need, as preamble, to sort out some attitudes that most theists would not like to believe characterize God's love for us.

Ed is a breeder of golden retrievers. He takes an interest in their overall health because he wants to compete successfully against rival breeders for pet-shop business. Ed's retrievers are benefitted by Ed and Ed prizes their health. Knowing just this much, however, we have no reason to believe that Ed loves his retrievers. Ed tends to his retrievers, we might suppose, solely because he sees them as means to an ulterior end about which he does care, his own well-being. Were we to discover that God's concern for us is analogous to Ed's concern for his retrievers—for example, that God supports our passing show solely for its contribution to the divine recreation—we should conclude that God does not love us. Kindly treatment towards others is compatible with enlightened self-interest. By itself, kindly treatment is not love.

Jo cares about the welfare of domesticated animals, believing that it is what humans owe to the species they have made unfit for survival independent of humans. She works tirelessly on projects sponsored by humane societies. She lives more austere than she might otherwise in order to further these projects. Her will bequeaths her estate to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. But for all of that, Jo does not have pets. She believes that she can accomplish more for the welfare of domesticated animals if she is not encumbered by the burden of responsible pet ownership. Jo's behavior is motivated differently from Ed's: it is a specimen of detached benevolence. "Benevolence" because Jo wants domesticated animals to flourish for their sakes, not hers. "Detached" because Jo does not want to become involved with the creatures she benefits.

I think it is clear that Jo does not love animals. In general, if x benefits y at a cost to x , it does not follow that x loves y . If God's attitude towards us is like Jo's attitude towards animals *and nothing more*, we should conclude once again that God does not love us. And if our treatment of our neighbors completely emulated Jo's treatment of domesticated animals, we would not love our neighbors. I shall assume that justification of the latter claim provides justification for the former. Suppose that all humans were to adopt the stance towards all humans,

including themselves, that Jo adopts towards domesticated animals. Think of the benefits. We would witness a large-scale, voluntary, and more equitable distribution of the world's resources. In human affairs tolerance and peaceful coexistence would be more pervasive than now. The world would be a utilitarian Utopia. Yet it would also be devoid of love. In its place we would find detached universal benevolence, with each of us striving to behave as Lord Shaftesbury would behave, except that our behavior would be aimed at a population of like-minded Shaftesburys.

What is missing? One thing that distinguishes human love from detached benevolence is love's focused selectivity. Suppose that Jo has only enough resources to provide for five of six puppies from the same litter. Al, who shares Jo's ideals, will provide for the sixth. It would be pointless to ask Jo *which* five should be supported by her funds and which one by Al's. It would satisfy all that Jo cares about if one simply assigned one of the numbers between one and six to each puppy, cast a die, and allocated Al's funds to the puppy whose number comes up. Contrast Jo's attitude with Vi's. Confronted with a litter of puppies, Vi invariably lavishes attention on the one puppy who responds most enthusiastically to her presence. Vi has thus had several pets whose companionship has enriched her life as she has enabled them to flourish.

Jo and Vi are similar in one respect. It is important to them not merely that domesticated animals flourish but that they be *agents* of animal flourishing; their desire in this respect is agent-centered. Yet they differ in another respect. Vi's desire, we may say, is "object-focused" whereas Jo's is "object-diffuse." The only properties that affect Jo's decisions are properties relevant to an animal's ability to flourish. Given any two animals whose prospects for flourishing are equal, it is a matter of indifference to Jo which animal should receive her support when only one can. Vi counts such properties, but she also, consciously or unconsciously, attaches great importance to some properties, such as enthusiastic response, that from the point of view of detached benevolence are irrelevant. Vi may even be led on some occasions to choose a puppy whose prospects for flourishing are less good than another's.

Object-focusing distinguishes detached benevolence from a conception of love that theists should seek, for the feature of object-focusing makes it explicit that love, as opposed to detached benevolence, involves the desire to enter into and sustain a relationship between lover and beloved (cf. Adams 1999, p. 139). Even so, agent-centered and object-focused love can be directed towards many kinds of things. The beloved might be a person, an animal, an artwork, or a vintage wine. Thus the nature of the relationship will vary depending on features of the beloved. Theists should be primarily concerned to explore a concept of love in which both lover and beloved are personal agents.

In an extended sense, *philia* means fondness or affectionate regard, attitudes that can be held towards a wide variety of things. But in books 8 and 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle examines what is surely the dominant sense of *philia*, namely, friendship. *Philia* is founded on the phenomenon of one's wishing good to a person for that person's own sake. For *philia* to be instantiated there must be reciprocation of one's goodwill, mutual recognition of that mutual goodwill, and mutual action based on that mutual recognition. These conditions restrict *philia* to beings whose mental life is rich enough to have cognition, self-awareness, desires, and intentions. (As Aristotle laconically observes, it is absurd to suppose that one can befriend wine.) *Philia* promises the theist what *eros* does not deliver, a conception of love that is distinctively and necessarily *interpersonal*.

The promise is hollow, however, if there is anything about *philia* that precludes a *philia* relationship between God and humans. The major threat would appear to be the radical inequality of the two parties. There can be friendships between unequals if the inequality is not extreme. For example, *philia* encompasses relationships between parent and child, in which, according to Aristotle, parents merit greater love from their children than they owe to their children. But can such a relationship exist between two beings, one of whom, as many theists maintain, is infinitely superior to the other? Two problems arise here, one for human participants in the putative *philia* relationship, the other for the divine participant. If, as many theists claim, God is omnipotent and utterly self-sufficient, then our wishing good to God for God's sake might seem to be droll at best: how could God *fail* to achieve the good? On the divine side of the relationship there is the disturbing thought that there must be precious little of worth in us to inspire God to want to befriend us.

Let us consider the second problem first. It receives powerful articulation from Jonathan Edwards. Here is Edwards at his friskiest:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. (Edwards 1995, pp. 97–98)

One might try to lighten the message by pointing out that the people loathsome in God's eyes are the sinners. But, alas, in Edwards's eyes we all are sinners. Edwards's analogy, however, is not particularly apt. Spiders and serpents are not of our making, nor are our encounters with them typically of our

choosing. Because some of them are dangerous and it is not always easy to discriminate between the dangerous and benign varieties, prudence dictates a default policy of blanket avoidance. In contrast, theists generally insist that God created us and freely chooses his encounters with us and that while we may disappoint God, we certainly pose no threat to him.

Return to the case of Vi. Vi does not judge her dogs by the same standards she uses to judge her human friends. Conversely, she does not hold her human friends up to the same standards she expects of her dogs. She simply enjoys the company of both, rejoicing in what they are and in what they may become. She thrives vicariously in their flourishing. She wishes them good for their own sakes. What reason can be given for thinking that, unlike the relationships Vi has with her human friends, Vi cannot enter into *philia* relationships with her dogs? That both parties to a friendship must be rational agents? The claim is not obvious, but even if true, it would not rule out *philia* relationships between God and humans. Still, there is the issue of the infinite distance in goodness separating us from God. Theists, I think, are entitled to ground their resistance to Edwards's hellfire in the very source of that infinite distance, that is, God's infinite goodness. One dimension of infinite goodness is infinite *bounty*, a capacity and willingness to care for all creatures great and small and to care in a way that is not necessarily proportioned to their greatness or smallness. Moreover, infinite knowledge, power, and goodness confer upon their possessor an infinite capacity for object-focusing. I lack sufficient knowledge, power, and goodwill to muster the object-focusing required to enter into *philia* relationships with very many others. God is under no such limitations. Object-focusing, writ large, seems to capture much of what has been traditionally conveyed by the notion of divine *providence*.

Theists may reasonably suppose, then, that infinitely bounteous, infinitely providential God desires to enter into *philia* relationships with us. We can, however, spurn the offer of friendship. This possibility of rejecting what God has to offer addresses the problem raised a while ago; namely, what the point of wishing good to God could be. If God prizes friendship with us, then there is a way in which God can fail to achieve a good, a good that depends on our willingness to affiliate ourselves with God.

VI. Agapē

In discussing *eros* and *philia* I have dwelt mostly on the implications these notions have for love between God and humans, leaving aside, for the most part, the implications the notions have for love among humans. The imbalance in attention was excusable on grounds that we were antecedently familiar with

erotic and friendship relations among humans. What was less clear is whether and how *eros* and *philia* apply to the divine. What remains to be discussed is the injunction to love one's neighbors as oneself. Consider first the question of the identity of the "neighbors" one is obligated to love. When asked this question, Jesus responded with the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37). A natural interpretation of the parable is that one's neighbors are just anyone in need, including, as the parable takes pains to illustrate, strangers one will encounter only once. But of course the point of the parable is not that one is obligated to love only strangers and then only when they are in need. It is rather that one's love must extend *even* to strangers in need when there is no prospect of reciprocation. And the Samaritan's actions are depicted as obligatory, not supererogatory: at the end of the parable Jesus simply says, "Go and do likewise."

Quinn has recently argued that neither *eros* nor *philia* captures this conception of love (Quinn 2000). Although Quinn does not call this conception *agapē*, the term seems apt, especially in light of the frequency with which *agapē* and its relatives appear in New Testament Greek. Endorsing Søren Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, Quinn ascribes to *agapē* impartiality and immutability, features conspicuously absent from human-to-human instances of *eros* and *philia*. Impartial *agapē* is a love of absolutely everyone, not just the few to whom we may be attached erotically or by ties of friendship. ("For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" Matt. 5:46.) Moreover, unlike *eros* and *philia*, immutable *agapē* is a love not subject to variation, no matter what vicissitudes should befall the beloved.

Quinn follows Kierkegaard (1995) in emphasizing the demandingness of *agapē* conceived in this way. "The stringency of the obligation to love is likely to give offense. In that respect, it resembles the requirements of impartial benevolence or utility maximization in secular moral theories, which are criticized for setting standards impossibly high or not leaving room for personal projects" (Quinn 2000, p. 59). In another respect, it is likely to give *more* offense than its secular ilk, since it sets an even higher standard. The demands of impartial benevolence or utility maximization are typically satisfied when an agent performs the action that best realizes the one or the other. It is not the business of theories stressing impartial benevolence or utility maximization to pry into the intentions and motives harbored by the agent. Such states of mind are of secondary interest at best, relevant, say, to predictions about the agent's long-range tendencies to act benevolently or maximally. In the picture that accompanies *agapē* in the New Testament, however, the agent's states of mind are crucial. For example, it is sufficient for a charge of adultery that a man look at a woman lustfully (Matt. 5:28). The duty laid upon one by this agapeistic

picture is not simply to conform one's *actions* to God's commands but also to conform one's *will* (cf. Mann 2004). It seems, then, that in order successfully to discharge the obligation imposed by *agapē*, one would need superhuman powers of what I have been calling object-focusing, saintly doses of compassion and forgiveness, and mastery, direct or indirect, over one's desires and intentions. Perhaps the acquisition of these powers is what is intended by the command that "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Perhaps in turn Quinn had something like these implications in mind in saying that the stringency of *agapē* is likely to give offense. What *agapē* offends against is the principle that "ought implies can": we are commanded by God to be perfect; we are thus under an obligation to perfect ourselves; perfecting ourselves entails acquiring *agapē*; acquiring *agapē* calls for developing abilities and character traits beyond our capacity to develop.

This predicament will probably be a litmus test for one's allegiance to the principle that "ought implies can." It would carry us beyond the confines of this essay to deal adequately with that issue. I will conclude by gesturing to one maneuver that many theists have adopted. Of course, they will say, we are not able *by ourselves* to perfect ourselves. But it need not follow that we must either deny the "ought implies can" principle or take ourselves to be under no obligation to perfect ourselves. Consider this analogy. Dot is a lifeguard on duty who spots Vic in danger of drowning. Dot is obligated to try to save Vic's life. But no matter how hard Dot might try, she would not succeed by herself: a shark would fatally attack Vic before she could reach him. Dot knows that, as always, Ace is patrolling the area. Ace is a shark hunter with unparalleled skills. Yet Ace's ways are inscrutable: sometimes Ace responds to the threat of shark attacks, sometimes he does not lift a finger. In particular, Ace's actions appear to be causally independent of Dot's. Now suppose Dot reasons as follows. "If I try to save Vic and Ace does not dispatch the shark, then I cannot succeed. So in that case, the principle that ought implies can entails that I am under no obligation to try. I could go through the motions of trying to save him. But if Ace does not intervene, then going through the motions would be futile. Moreover, I was never obligated to put on a show of pretending to try to save Vic; I was supposed to be obligated to genuinely try. Now I feel lucky and lazy today. I am not going to try to save Vic, and I will bet that Ace will not dispatch the shark. If that is so, then there is no obligation that I will have failed to fulfill."

In reaction to Dot's reasoning, it seems plausible to say that she is obligated to try to save Vic, even in the case in which Ace does nothing to intervene on her behalf. One can hold this intuition while not surrendering the "ought implies can" principle if one is willing to make the following maneuver. The obligation picked out by "ought" is the obligation to try to save Vic. The ability picked out by "can" is not the ability to save Vic *sans phrase*. It is rather the

ability to save Vic *if there are no sharks present or if Ace exercises his expertise*. These abilities, though conditional, are not capricious. For one thing, they are abilities that many people lack. Dot's conditional ability is grounded in her having sufficient swimming strength and life-saving skills to succeed (were it not for the shark). For another, in an intuitive sense but one which is hard to make precise, the conditions that have to be met are not outlandish given the real-world circumstances. There are nearby possible worlds—in which the shark prowls elsewhere or in which, if the shark is on the scene, Ace decides to intervene—wherein Dot succeeds in saving Vic. But the defender of the “ought implies can” principle must not allow the conditionality of the “can” to infect the “ought:” Dot's obligation is to try to save Vic, period, *not* to try to save Vic *provided that* there are no sharks present or *provided that* Ace exercises his expertise. In short, the “ought” in this case is unconditional while the “can” is (noncapriciously) conditional.

In similar fashion, a theist can preserve the “ought implies can” principle by claiming that the obligation to perfect ourselves is unconditional while the ability is conditional; in particular, conditional on divine grace, an integral part of God's love. If the obligation to perfect oneself entails an obligation to extend *agapē* to all others, even our enemies, it turns out that our ability to love our “neighbors” depends on God's ability to love us.

VII. Summing Up

I suggested earlier that an adequate normative theory must be rationally defensible, systematic, coherent, cognitively perspicuous, and motivationally realistic. What are the prospects for the theory sketched here?

Recall that two components of rational defensibility are universality and some significant degree of consonance with our pre-theoretical intuitions about what is right and what is wrong. Universality is vouchsafed (perhaps to an uncomfortable degree) by the agapeistic interpretation of who our neighbors are. The theory can also provide an account of consonance. For example, reflective humans hold the intuition that cruelty is wrong. The theory provides a natural validation of that intuition: cruelty violates the commandment of neighborly love. It is easy to multiply examples, and this fact goes some considerable way to accounting for the theory's systematicity. Because the theory contains two normative principles, one might worry that they could conflict, thus exposing the theory to a charge of incoherence. Could there be a case in which what is required by love for God conflicts with what is required by love for neighbor? Defenders of the theory have strategies at their disposal to defuse the worry. One strategy, for example, is to insist that the two principles are

lexically ordered; that is, that in cases of apparent or potential conflict, the command to love God always takes precedence over the command of neighborly love. The two principles appear to be perspicuous, or at least not any less perspicuous than other, rival moral principles. Finally, in building on the phenomenon of love, tempered by reason, the theory builds on a powerful human motivating factor.

The theory I have sketched is a theory according to which God makes the most general moral rules, the normative rules that determine what actions are obligatory, what are forbidden, and what are permissible. I have argued that God's commands do the making, not God's will. The theory would not, however, suffer shipwreck were it to be shown that a divine will theory is on balance preferable. For what would remain on either account are the injunctions to love God and one's neighbors, injunctions promulgated by perfectly good God. I have structured my exposition of the injunctions around the trio of *eros*, *philia*, and *agapē* because of the influence those terms have had in the philosophical discussion of love. The theory should be of some interest to theists and to nontheists willing to investigate a distinctively theistic normative theory.

References

- Adams, Robert M. 1999. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Adams, Robert M. 2002. "Responses." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64: 475–490.
- Comte-Sponville, André. 2001. *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Edwards, Jonathan. 1995. "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. J. E. Smith, H. S. Stout, and K. P. Minkema, 89–105. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Original work published in 1741.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1991. "Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue." In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor, 179–279. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Original work published 1797.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1995. *Works of Love*. Trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Original work published in 1847.
- LaFollette, Hugh, ed. 2000. *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Mann, William E. 2004. "Ethics." In *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, ed. J. Brower and K. Guilfooy, 279–304. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mann, William E. 2010. "Necessity." In *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. C. Taliaferro, P. Draper, and P. L. Quinn, 285–291. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. Reprinted as Chapter 8 of this volume.
- Murphy, Mark C. 1998. "Divine Command, Divine Will, and Moral Obligation." *Faith and Philosophy* 15: 3–27.
- Quinn, Philip L. 2000. "Divine Command Theory." In *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, ed. Hugh LaFollette, 53–73. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

- Quinn, Philip L. 2002. "Obligation, Divine Commands and Abraham's Dilemma." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64: 459–466.
- Sherry, Patrick. 1997. "Beauty." In *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. P. L. Quinn and C. Taliaferro, 279–285. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wierenga, Edward. 1983. "A Defensible Divine Command Theory." *Noûs* 17: 387–407.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. 1995. *Divine Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The Metaphysics of Divine Love

Some time ago the State of Vermont's Department of Motor Vehicles refused to issue a "vanity" license plate that read JOHN316. The grounds for the refusal were that the plate contravened the state's policy not to allow license plates that are obscene or offensive or that promote a particular political or religious viewpoint. Be assured, Gentle Reader, that I have not just transmitted an obscenity. The plate manqué conveyed a religious message by alluding to chapter 3, verse 16, of the Gospel according to John, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." I shall not discuss the merits of the DMV's policy; mentioning it was a transparent attempt to capture your attention. My focus instead is on the John 3:16 text, and only a part of it at that. John describes an immensity of love that beggars human comprehension. I shall concentrate on a seemingly simple, preliminary question, trying to establish a beachhead, not to chart a limitless territory. Why does God love us at all? The question is not intended to prompt an inquiry into what it is about us that God finds lovable. It is, instead, a question about the metaphysics of divine love. How is it that a perfect being can love beings that are conspicuously imperfect?

I. Some Preliminaries

In what follows I shall assume a conception of God according to which God is a perfect being. The conception includes but is not limited to ascriptions of omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect goodness. It is fair to ask whether and how attributes like these might be related to love. It would help to further the inquiry if we provide some rudimentary account of love. I shall list some claims made in the recent philosophical literature. The philosophically fastidious, who hanker for definitions that pass Socratic muster, should avert their eyes. Some, perhaps all, of the claims are controversial. I am inclined to think that

five of the six claims are defensible. For considerations that will emerge shortly, I am less convinced about the sixth.

Intrinsic Value. Many have supposed that loving is a kind of valuing, in particular, valuing the beloved for his/her/its own sake and not merely as a means to some extrinsic end.¹ A point closely related to this supposition, if not an entailment of it, is that the beloved is, in the eyes of the lover, nonfungible. If the beloved has or is a physical body, no molecule-for-molecule replacement of the beloved would satisfy the lover. Nonfungibility is distinct from alienability. A person may love her collection of authentic pre-Columbian pottery but be willing to part with it if the price and guarantees of preservation are right. (It does not follow that she would or should be similarly willing to part with her child.)

Beloved's Good. Love involves desiring the good for the beloved. This desire does not entail a desire to adopt the beloved's interests as one's own. Those interests may not in fact be good for the beloved.²

Relationship Value. A lover values not only the beloved but also the "ongoing history that one shares" with the beloved.³

Reciprocation. Some kinds of love, for example, romantic love, friendship, and parental love, flourish or are perfected only when the beloved responds, in an appropriate way, to the lover's love.⁴

Involuntariness. It "is a necessary condition of love that it is not under our direct and immediate control. . . . [W]hat we love and what we fail to love is not up to us."⁵

Vulnerability. Love "arrests our tendencies toward emotional self-protection from another person" and "disarms our emotional defenses; it makes us vulnerable to the other."⁶

¹ Variations on this theme are to be found in Velleman 1999, Kolodny 2003, and Frankfurt 2004.

² Eleonore Stump puts forward this view, in exposition of Aquinas (in 2006). Frankfurt appears to endorse the adoption of interests version; see Frankfurt 2004, 37 and 80. **Beloved's Good** is denied by Velleman 1999, 353.

³ Kolodny 2003, 136. Stump argues that valuing a relationship is neither necessary nor sufficient for love. It is not necessary in cases of unrequited love at first sight; for example, Dante's love for Beatrice. It is not sufficient in cases in which a relationship is valued but in which love is absent; for example, Dante's long-distance relationship with his wife. See Stump 2006, 26–27.

⁴ **Reciprocation** appears out of place in some cases of love as the admiration of excellence, because the object of love, for example, an artwork, may not be the sort of thing that is capable of responding. See Adams 1999, *passim*. Frankfurt denies **Reciprocation**; see Frankfurt 2004, 42.

⁵ Frankfurt 2004, 44 and 46.

⁶ Velleman 1999, 361. See also Kolodny 2003, 151–152.

Here are a few observations about the first three claims: I shall defer discussion of **Reciprocation**, **Involuntariness**, and **Vulnerability** until the end of the chapter. If we were somehow to discover that God uses us merely as interchangeable and ultimately dispensable pawns in some sort of cosmic chess game that he plays solely for his own amusement, then, invoking **Intrinsic Value**, we should conclude that God does not love us. I suspect that by appealing to **Beloved's Good**, we would come to the same conclusion were we to find out God could not care less about our happiness or flourishing. If God's mode of eternal existence entails that nothing is past or future to God, that the whole span of an individual's life is simultaneously present to God's awareness, then it will take some work to apply **Relationship Value** to God's love for time-bound beings. In this case only the beloved has an ongoing *history*. So it is incumbent on anyone who wants to maintain God's eternity along with **Relationship Value** to explain how God can participate in a relationship that is ongoing.⁷

Finally, to add a claim that will be discussed immediately,

No Reason. When people are asked to explain why they love someone, they founder for answers. If they cite praiseworthy attributes of the beloved, their answers sound like ad hoc rationalizations, not genuine reasons. Moreover, their list of attributes lays them open to the criticism that consistency demands that they should also love anyone else who has the same attributes. According to one recent account, the proper diagnosis of this manifestly poor performance is that love is not founded on reason. Being in love *provides* the lover with reasons to act in various ways, but being in love is *based* on any number of vagarious, nonrational causes.⁸ A weak version of this claim maintains that one *can* love without having reasons for loving. A strong version maintains that one *must not* have reasons if one's love is genuine.

II. Arationalism

Perplexity would rise and confidence fall had John 3:16 concluded with "But God has absolutely no reason to love you." Does God have reason to love us? What explains his love for us? Long ago Plato shrewdly observed that love is connected to various modes of creative activity, such as sexual reproduction (erotic and familial love), the transmission of knowledge to children (a kind of propagation of one's soul in one's offspring), and the discovery of new ideas

⁷ See, for example, Stump and Kretzmann 1981.

⁸ See Frankfurt 2004, 38–39.

(love of wisdom).⁹ Let us extend Plato's idea and suppose that God's creative activity results in the world we inhabit and that this creation is an expression of God's love. If so, did God have reason to create? I want to examine two answers to this question that take opposite stances on **No Reason**.

It is safe to say that Harry Frankfurt is a staunch defender of **No Reason**. On his account of love, it is important to distinguish having a reason and giving an explanation. There is an explanation one can offer for God's loving us. But the explanation makes no appeal to reasons. Love, according to Frankfurt, does not essentially involve reason. In particular, love need not be a rational response of the lover to something antecedently inherent (or believed to be inherent) in the beloved. The lover does not *detect* value in the beloved; the lover's love *confers* value on the beloved.¹⁰ Consistent with this view, Frankfurt paints the following picture of God's creative love.

On some accounts, the creative activity of God is mobilized by an entirely inexhaustible and uninhibited love. This love, which is understood as being totally without limit or condition, moves God to desire a plenum of existence in which everything that can conceivably be an object of love is included. God wants to love as much as it is possible to love. . . .

To say that the divine love is infinite and unconditional is to say that it is completely indiscriminate. God loves *everything*, regardless of its character or its consequences. Now this is tantamount to saying that the creative activity in which God's love of Being is expressed and fulfilled has no motive beyond an unlimitedly promiscuous urge to love without boundary or measure. Insofar as people think of God's essence as love, then, they must suppose that there is no divine providence or purpose that constrains in any way the sheer maximal realization of possibility. If God is love, the universe has no point except simply to be.¹¹

Many philosophers will resist this picture because of its necessitarian implications. God had no reason to create—just a primordial, irresistible urge—no choice about whether to create, no choice about how much to create—as much as

⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, 206b–209e.

¹⁰ Frankfurt 2004, 38–39.

¹¹ Frankfurt 2004, pp. 62–63. It is not clear from the text that Frankfurt endorses this picture, as opposed to simply admiring it. One account that approximates Frankfurt's description takes as its point of departure the "Dionysian Principle," that "Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and (thereby) of being." The name and this statement of the principle is to be found in Kretzmann 1991a, 217. If God is essentially goodness itself and goodness itself entails limitless love, then, by the Dionysian Principle, God cannot help but bring into existence creatures as subjects upon which to lavish his love.

possible—and no choice about whether to love what he creates. Nonetheless the picture meshes well with Frankfurt's account of love. Many would grant his thesis, expressed in **Involuntariness**, that love "is not under our direct and immediate voluntary control." Without a special explanation to the contrary, Frankfurt is entitled to maintain that this involuntariness extends to divine love. His depiction of divine love needs more than this, however. The nagging thought remains that involuntariness is an imperfection, a constraint, something that is incompatible with a conception of God as perfect. The elements of a reply may reside in Frankfurt's claim that the kind of necessity under which lovers operate has its source in their will: "It is by our own will, and not by any external or alien force, that we are constrained."¹² Frankfurt has famously distinguished between freedom of action and freedom of will.¹³ A person has freedom of action if she is doing what she wants to be doing. She has freedom of will if she wants what she wants to want; that is, if her first-order desires are in harmony with and endorsed by her second-order desires. If God loves creatures because of an "unlimitedly promiscuous urge to love," then his loving creatures is an exercise of freedom of action. And if God has this urge to love because he wants to have it, then he has freedom of will. One might protest that if the urge is an essential feature of God, a part of God's nature, it seems mistaken to say that he has it *because* he wants to have it: this second-order desire appears to be doing no causal or explanatory work. It can be replied on Frankfurt's behalf that one can want to retain what one already has, what one has never lacked, what in fact one could not separate from oneself even if, *per impossibile*, one wanted to.¹⁴ Frankfurt seems within his rights to suppose, then, that God's will is so perfectly integrated that he recognizes his primordial urge to create and to love what he creates, recognizes the urge's centrality to and inseparability from what he is—his Godhead—and takes delight in that recognition.

III. Rationalism

Frankfurt's account of creation is a robust application of **No Reason** to God's creative activity. **No Reason** is inconsistent with any philosophical program that maintains that everything has a reason. When one thinks of such a program, one's mind turns lightly to Leibniz. Leibniz certainly has much to say about God and creation. But Leibniz's God does not immediately conjure up

¹² Frankfurt 2004, 46.

¹³ Frankfurt 1971.

¹⁴ The thesis that desire does not entail the absence of the object of desire is endorsed by Adams 1999, 133–135, and is attributed to Aquinas in Stump 2006, 28. Another example is provided, if Aquinas is correct, by God's being necessarily existent and essentially good: as such, God wills his own being and goodness necessarily; *Summa contra Gentiles*, 1.80.

images of love. Yet Leibniz and Frankfurt agree on one big thing, that the kind of world God can create is delimited by God's nature. They disagree on what the delimitation is and how it works. For Frankfurt, love leads God to create as many objects, or as much stuff, as he possibly can. Frankfurt does say that whatever God creates must "conceivably be an object of love," but that appears to impose no constraint, since "God loves *everything*, regardless of its character or its consequences." All that is crucial is that there be as much or as many. For Leibniz, the delimitation imposed by God's nature is different. As supremely knowledgeable, powerful, and good, God must create the best world possible. There are infinitely many possible worlds that are suboptimal, but there is a kind of necessity that prevents God from creating any of them. Had there been two or more worlds tied for the title of best, God could not have created more than one of them, since each possible world corresponds to a maximally consistent state of affairs, and not even God can violate the Principle of Noncontradiction. But neither can Leibniz's God violate the Principle of Sufficient Reason, the thesis that for every state of affairs that obtains, there must be a sufficient reason for why that state of affairs obtains. If any two possible worlds were tied for first place, God would have no reason to choose to create one over the other. In that case God would not create any world.¹⁵

The kind of necessity that prevents God from creating a suboptimal world is described by Leibniz as moral, not metaphysical. Perfect goodness imposes performance standards on its possessor that are moral in character. Writing in explication of Leibniz, Robert Merrihew Adams says that "it is necessary that if God did not choose the best, God would not be perfectly good."¹⁶ Call this *Leibniz's counterfactual*. If God is perfectly good, then *modus tollens* on Leibniz's counterfactual yields the result that God chooses to create the best possible world.¹⁷

There are two problems with Leibniz's counterfactual, even if we allow Leibniz the Principle of Sufficient Reason to rule out ties. One is well known. What reason do we have to believe that there is a best possible world? Might there not be an endless chain of possible worlds, each successive one better than its predecessor, with no final link in the chain? Leibniz's answer is that in such a case, God would have had no sufficient reason to create one world instead of the other and so would have created nothing. In that case, nothing

¹⁵ For further discussion of Leibniz and references to relevant texts, see Mann (1991).

¹⁶ Adams 1994, 22.

¹⁷ Counterfactual *modus tollens* is valid but not counterfactual contraposition. It might be that Leibniz's counterfactual is equivalent to "It is necessary that if God was perfectly good, then God chose to create the best possible world." If so, however, that will depend on the modal status of "God is perfectly good" and "God chooses to create the best possible world," along with a determination whether counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are always true and whether counterfactuals with necessary consequents are always true. See Lewis 1973, 35–36.

would exist now. But something does exist now. Therefore God created the best possible world. Skeptics will be happy to work the argument in the opposite direction. It is much easier to believe that this world exists than that it is the best of all possible worlds. Therefore it is easier to believe either that God did not create this world or, if he did, that God was not conforming his creative behavior to the Principle of Sufficient Reason.¹⁸

The second problem is this. Leibniz's counterfactual is silent on the question why God should choose to create at all. Would God be less than perfectly good if he decided to create nothing? On the hypothesis that there is no end of better and better possible worlds, this problem is especially poignant. For any world God might create, there would then be infinitely many worlds infinitely better than it. Put more shockingly, whatever world God might create would then be infinitely *worse* than infinitely many worlds God could have created. Why create in those circumstances?¹⁹ But the problem remains even if there is a best possible world. Consider an analogy. Suppose it is true that if Antonio the luthier chooses to make a violin, he will make the best violin he is capable of making. It does not follow that Antonio will choose to make any violin. Perhaps he is absorbed in playing bocce. So even when we concede that if God chooses to create a world, he will choose the best world that he can and that the best world that he can create is the best possible world, we still lack an account of why God chooses to create any world at all.

One might hope to find the right kind of explanation in an argument that dates back to Plato's *Timaeus*. Plato suggests that if God did not create, he would be guilty of the character fault of *phthonos*, usually translated as envy or jealousy.²⁰ The standard translation does not help. It is hard to see how one can be envious or jealous of what does not exist, especially when one controls whether it comes into and stays in existence or not. Perhaps, then, we should try a different understanding of *phthonos*. We could suppose that what a Platonist means is that God would exhibit the character fault of *miserliness*, understood as an unwillingness to share a good one has in abundance, were he not to create. Since we are supposing that God is perfectly good, a being who has no character faults, God cannot be miserly. We now have one candidate for an explanation of why God is required to create.

Beware, however, lest the explanation become a sorcerer's apprentice. Miserliness is the sort of fault that comes in degrees, a fault that a perfect being cannot possess to any degree. Now suppose that there is a sequence of possible worlds,

¹⁸ For a recent discussion of related issues, see Rowe 2004.

¹⁹ These points are discussed penetratingly in Kretzmann 1991b.

²⁰ Plato, *Timaeus*, 29e. Plato's demiurge is ill suited to fill the role of God but is as close a candidate as anything one can find in Plato's writings.

W_1, W_2, \dots, W_n , such that each successive W_{i+1} is better than its predecessor, W_i . Then for *any* pair of worlds, W_i and W_{i+1} , in the sequence, God would be less miserly were he to create W_{i+1} instead of W_i . If there is a best possible world, then avoidance of miserliness will lead God to create it. But if the sequence is upwardly unending, then God can never clear himself of the charge of miserliness.

This Platonically inspired account suffers from two difficulties, to be mentioned now, to be discussed shortly. First, it proceeds negatively, by specifying what God's goodness must *preclude* rather than specifying positively what God's goodness might *include*. Second, as a consequence of the first difficulty, the question whether God is to be charged with miserliness depends entirely on the value structure of the hierarchy of possible worlds: if it is upwardly endless, God cannot escape the charge; if it terminates in a best possible world, then God is morally required to choose the best one in order to escape the charge. To put it bluntly, the possible worlds are in the driver's seat, not God.

IV. Taking Stock

Let us take stock. Frankfurt's voluntaristic picture of an indiscriminately loving God has no problem answering the question "Why did God create?" That is just what God *does*, on Frankfurt's view: the world is a maximal expression of God's will, a will besotted with love (*willingly* besotted, to be sure) unmediated by God's intellect. Nor does Frankfurt's God have any worry about selecting just the right world from among a class of rivals. Any world will do (as long as it is chockablock with stuff), because it will acquire its value from God's will. Leibniz's God creates a world that Leibniz takes to be the maximal expression of *reason*, a world that is the best possible, as Leibniz puts it, in virtue of being "the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena."²¹ An uncharitable soul might think that for Leibniz's God, creation is very much like finding an elegant solution to a mathematical problem. Frankfurt's account is strong where Leibniz's account is weak, namely, as a response to the question "Why would God create anything?" Conversely, Leibniz's account is strong where Frankfurt's is weak. If, as Frankfurt maintains, things in general have no value independent of the attitudes others take towards them, then we have no way to account for what many theists believe, that God is not good because we admire him nor even because he admires himself.

Perhaps by now you harbor the suspicion that the world that Frankfurt's God creates just is the same world as the world that Leibniz's God creates. I can point to nothing to allay that suspicion. Even if the suspicion were confirmed,

²¹ Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, sec. 6, in Leibniz 1989, 39.

it would remain true that Frankfurt and Leibniz disagree about *how* the mind of God operates in creating. As can happen with philosophical disagreement, however, the disputants share a common assumption that spawns the disagreement and that in itself is questionable. I shall use exposure and rejection of this assumption as the first step to what I take to be a more satisfactory account of God's love for his creatures.

V. Simplicity

The common assumption I impute to Frankfurt and Leibniz is what can be called the *separation thesis*. It maintains that the will and intellect are two separate (but interacting) modules, one responsible, roughly, for desires, the other, roughly, for beliefs. Because the separation thesis has been so pervasive in philosophical and psychological accounts of human mental structure and behavior, it is natural to project it onto the divine mental structure and to suppose, therefore, that divine behavior results from God's will interacting with God's intellect. Although the separation thesis is neutral about questions of domination, philosophers have found it hard to resist speculation as to which module is, or should be, in charge over the other. (Think of the difference between Plato and Hume on the relation between reason and the passions.) So it is here: Frankfurt assigns priority to God's will; Leibniz, to God's intellect. They thus offer differing accounts of what prompts creation even though the accounts might converge on the same world being created.

In rejecting the separation thesis in the case of God, I do not take myself to be rejecting a part of folk psychology. I am presenting instead a picture of God in which God is not like ordinary folk. The picture is inspired by the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS), according to which God, unlike ordinary creatures, has no parts. Robust versions of the DDS assert that God has no spatial parts (as befits a spiritual being), no temporal parts (no past or future distinct from an eternal present), and no metaphysical parts (no distinction between essential attributes and the subject of which they are attributes).²² For present purposes all I need is a modest segment of the DDS; namely, a denial of the separation thesis to the divine mental architecture. Leibniz's will may be a module distinct from Leibniz's intellect, but no similar modular plurality is to be found in God. Frankfurt's preferred mode of speaking favors

- (1) The world is an outpouring of a supremely loving will.

²² See, for example, Mann 1982, Stump and Kretzmann 1985, and Stump 2003, ch. 3.

Leibniz endorses

- (2) The world is an expression of a supremely rational intellect.

From the viewpoint of the DDS, (1) and (2) necessarily make the same claim: an outpouring of the divine will just is an expression of the divine intellect. To put the point differently, consider this analogy. When Jones says that the highest mountain in the world is Everest while Smith counters that the highest mountain in the world is Chomolungma, we can say that the dispute between them is merely verbal or merely epistemological: Jones and Smith are necessarily reporting the same fact (if they report a fact at all). The dispute evaporates once one realizes that Everest = Chomolungma. In similar fashion a defender of the DDS can regard (1) and (2) as saying the same thing. Even so, the analogy is not perfect. Jones and Smith both say something that in itself is accurate and unproblematic. The DDS defender will insist, however, that the language of (1) and (2) encourages continued and unwarranted application to God of the separation thesis. It would be better to invent less misleading terminology and fuse (1) and (2) into something like

- (3) The world is an outpouring of a supremely loving and rational *wintellect*.²³

The DDS is not the sort of doctrine that commands everyone's immediate assent. Its philosophical acceptance depends on what light it might shed on various issues in philosophical theology. In the present case it helps to resolve the weaknesses pointed out earlier in Frankfurt's and Leibniz's accounts. It was a weakness of Frankfurt's account that it had no plausible way to explain God's goodness. On one of the more robust versions of the DDS, God is goodness itself, a goodness independent of all attitudes and the source of goodness in all other beings. Leibniz's weakness was the inability to provide a reason why God would bother to create anything. But if God knows that he is goodness itself, knows that goodness entails lovingkindness, and knows that lovingkindness is best realized by sharing the gift of goodness with others, then God has all the reason (= all the will) he needs to create others on which to bestow goodness.

VI. Satisficing

Earlier I had planted two red flags next to the Platonic account of God's motivation to create. The first flag signaled a complaint that the account proceeded

²³ 'Wintellect' fuses 'will' and 'intellect'. There is, presumably, at most one exemplar of this fusion.

negatively, not positively. Avoidance of miserliness—the signature element of the Platonic account—does not convey what lovingkindness does. To create out of lovingkindness is to be spiritually invested in what one creates. Mere avoidance of the charge of miserliness does not entail anything about the psychological relation between the creator and the thing created. Suppose that Antonio the luthier makes violins solely because he does not wish to be regarded as a kind of willful underachiever. It does not follow that Antonio cares about the violins he creates, except insofar as they tend to insulate him from a charge of being a slacker. It might be that he is not fazed by news of his violins being used as props to be destroyed ignominiously in Hollywood B movies. Things are different for Antonio's fellow luthier, Andrea, who cares deeply about the careers of the violins he creates. Knowing the beautiful sound they can produce, Andrea wants his instruments to be in the hands of the best violinists interpreting masterpieces in the violin literature; country and western fiddlers need not apply. Andrea's desire is *agent-centered*. Although it would be wonderful, from his point of view, if there were excellent violins in existence, it would be even more wonderful if there were excellent violins in existence because *he* has made (at least some of) them. A person does not have to be a Marxist to believe that not to care about creating and not to care about what one creates is to be alienated from one's labor, thereby jeopardizing one's flourishing.²⁴ To be sure, in sending his violins out into the world Andrea has become more *vulnerable* than Antonio. Unlike Antonio, it matters to Andrea that his violins not fall into the hands of B movie directors or hack fiddlers. But at the same time, under Andrea's guidance Andrea's violins are given a chance of having their potential more fully realized than do Antonio's violins. As a consequence, Andrea himself stands to have his life thereby enriched in a way in which Antonio does not. If alienation is a condition that implies an agent's involuntary lack of control over a set of circumstances, we may suppose that it is not a condition that can affect God. It does not follow, however, that God is invulnerable, a topic to which I return below.

The second red flag was this. An omniscient, omnipotent being who is out simply to dodge a charge of miserliness is doomed to failure should any possible world that he creates be such that there are better possible worlds than it. It might seem that a similar liability confronts a being who wishes to create a world that is an object and expression of divine love; namely, that there might always be other worlds which that being could have created that would have been better objects and expressions of divine love. The two cases are not parallel. In theological contexts the notion of *grace* is frequently and specifically

²⁴ See Frankfurt 2004, ch. 3, for related remarks concerning the relations between love for others and self-love.

described as divine assistance required for human salvation. There is a more generic notion of grace, however, that is relevant for our present purposes. Adams characterizes this notion as “love that is not completely explained by the excellence of its object,” adding that “It is commonly and plausibly thought that the love of an infinite, transcendently good being for finite beings could not be anything but grace in this sense, on the ground that no finite excellence could *deserve* the love of such a transcendent being.”²⁵ In order to test the case I wish to develop, let us suppose that there is no greatest possible world. And let us suppose further that not even omnipotent God can *create* beings that are *infinitely* excellent. (It can be argued that this latter supposition follows from the notion of creation.) Under these suppositions omniscient God will realize that it is impossible for him to create the best, because there simply *is* no best possible world to be created. Should this be the occasion for divine languor?

No. Suppose that Andrea is crafting a violin with the intention that it be used for classical music. He believes that he could make a better violin, in terms of tonal quality, than the one he is making. But he also believes that the tonal superiority of the better violin is beyond the threshold of human hearing. Not even the most discerning musician or rabid audiophile would be able to tell the difference between the two instruments. Suppose further that there would be no extra expense to Andrea, in labor or materials, in making the better violin. He would in fact make the better violin if he intended it to be put to some quasi-scientific purpose for which the tonal superiority was relevant. But in the circumstances described, Andrea has no dispositive reason to make the better violin. He will craft a violin that is very good, adequate or more than adequate for the purpose to which it will be put. Andrea will thus *satisfice*. Satisficing can occur in a situation in which one may choose one from a number of courses of action whose outcomes can be ordered on some scale of increasing intensity. The chooser has some goal that she seeks to bring about. Specification of the goal and the chooser’s desires set a floor on the scale below which she will not choose, but the specification does not identify the floor with the (or a) ceiling; that is, there are points on the scale above the floor that the chooser can rationally neglect. Satisficing is not to be confused with cost-benefit optimizing. Settling for a nine-dollar payout when one could have had ten dollars is an example of optimizing if, under the circumstances, getting the extra one dollar would have required a two-dollar investment of resources. But taking the nine-dollar payout in these circumstances would not be satisficing. Now there would be nothing wrong with Andrea’s choosing to optimize in his situation. But neither is there anything wrong or irrational with his consciously rejecting optimization and choosing to satisfice.

²⁵ Adams 1999, 151.

No doubt you see where I intend to go with the analogy, and you may wonder whether identifying the Great Artificer with the Great Satisficer borders on blasphemy. I think not, for reasons that emerge from reflecting on analogical similarities between divine creation and Andrea's case, along with counterfactual variations of the two cases. First, the putative similarities. Andrea's crafting and God's creating are cases of purposeful production.²⁶ In both cases a product comes into existence as a result of conscious, goal-directed activity. Thus, the cases differ from the way in which the Colorado River produced the Grand Canyon. Unlike Antonio, the cynical luthier, Andrea is emotionally invested in the violins he makes. Their flourishing in the ways in which a violin can flourish is a source of joy to him. We may argue similarly that a deity who fabricated a world simply to test the extent of his power, without any regard for the well-being of his creatures, has nothing to care for as a result of his exercise, nothing whose flourishing can be a source of joy to him. Such a being would not be perfectly good. Andrea is not to be faulted for making the violin he makes even though he believes that he could have made a better one. We have supposed that God could have created better worlds than the world he did create. Andrea gets off the hook because the better violin he could have made would not have served his purpose nor the interests of listeners any better than the violin he did make. We must ask, then, whether the better worlds that God could have created would have fulfilled his purpose or the interests of his creatures any better than the world he did create.

In order to deal with this question I suggest that we consider some counterfactual variations of the two cases. Suppose that Andrea finds himself in a world in which human auditory acuity is better than it is in the actual world, better enough so that it can detect tonal qualities that pass by unnoticed in the actual world. If Andrea's intentions remain fixed between these two worlds, then Andrea will not make the violin that satisfied in the actual world. He will make the better violin because it now makes a musical difference.

The analogy suggests that we can suppose that God's relevant intentions remain constant across possible worlds. We can also suppose that God's relevant intentions are agent-centered, in particular, that it matters to God not only that he *create* but that *he* create. (That an agent knows that no one else is able to do what the agent can do does not disqualify the agent's intention from being agent-centered.) As for the content of God's intentions, we may hazard the conjecture that they include the intention that the world be an expression

²⁶ We may regard fabrication, invention, artistic composition, and creation as species of purposeful production, with the understanding that instances of the species may nonetheless work in radically different ways. In particular, many theists will insist that divine creation is production *ex nihilo*.

of his love by being a manifestation of his goodness to the creatures that inhabit that world. Put stress on the clause “to the creatures that inhabit that world”: the fitness of a world as an expression of God’s love depends on the competencies of the denizens of that very world and not, say, on the competencies of beings in some other possible world.

To a limited extent Andrea *calibrates* his productive skills to fit the competencies of those who will appreciate his products. It is this phenomenon that allows him to satisfice in the situation as I described it. There is of course this difference between human violin making and divine creating: Andrea has no say about the design and specification of human auditory capacities. He can make violins but he cannot make the audience that will hear them. God chooses the world to create and, in so choosing, chooses the world’s inhabitants. God’s task of calibrating a world to its inhabitants is, at bottom, a matter of creating a world that, at a minimum, matches its goodness to the sensory and cognitive capacities of its creatures. God’s intention that the created world be an expression of divine love does not constrain him to infuse into the world types or degrees of goodness that could never be detected or appreciated in that world. God’s love allows for satisficing.

VII. Doubts

One should anticipate at this point the following series of ruminations. They signal the onset of the Problem of Evil, a problem I cannot begin to address adequately in this chapter. Objection the First: “I agree that there would be no point to embellishing the world with types and degrees of goodness that could never be experienced. But God could endow a world—he could have endowed *our* world, to take one pointed example—with fewer of the sorts of evils its inhabitants *can* experience.” Reply: perhaps. But it could be that God tailors a world in the way that loving parents behave towards their children, as described by Frankfurt:

Parents who love their children take great care, if they are sensible, to avoid being indulgent. Their love does not motivate them to give their children whatever the children happen most to want. Rather, they show their love by being concerned about what is genuinely important to their children—in other words, by aiming to protect and to advance their children’s true interests.²⁷

As for what appears to be a surplus of evil in the world, much of it could be owing to the misuse of human freedom. The dialectical moves and

²⁷ Frankfurt 2004, 78–79.

countermoves to be made here are as familiar as they are inconclusive. I have no resolution to offer.²⁸

Objection the Second: “God could have created a souped-up alternative to the actual world, containing the types and degrees of goodness not found in the actual world and populated by us with our sensory and cognitive competencies enhanced to savor these exotica.” Reply: there are two considerations here that should be examined before one endorses this objection. First, in virtue of its having smarter inhabitants with more refined sensitivities, the alternative world may contain more horrendous evils than the actual world. *Pace* Plato, not all evildoing is attributable to ignorance. Will and intellect may be one in God, but they are not in humans. Second, it may be impossible, even for God, to upgrade our competencies or alter our wills while keeping our personal identities fixed. The inhabitants in the souped-up world might simply not be us. In light of these considerations, it is not clear that God would have expressed his love for us any more appropriately by having created the alternative world.

Objection the Third: “If the only constraint that God’s goodness imposes on his creative choice is that the world be an adequate expression of God’s love for its inhabitants, then the world need not contain any sentient creatures. God could focus his loving attention exclusively on the growth of healthy plants or the intricate arrangement of rock formations.”

VIII. Resolution

Reply: now is the time to recall **Reciprocation**, **Involuntariness**, and **Vulnerability**. Many theists claim that creatures like us, who have reason and will, image God more closely than rocks and plants do. A world devoid of creatures like us could very well be adequate expression of God’s love *for* its inhabitants but not *to* its inhabitants. Add rational, willful creatures and you get a world, some of whose inhabitants may be capable of realizing that the world is an expression of God’s love and, in that realization, come to love God in return. If **Reciprocation** is true, God’s love for these creatures will flourish only if they return that love in a way appropriate to them. Now think of the quandary that God might face should he want to create such beings. It might be that the separation thesis depicts a necessary feature of their mental architecture. That is, it might be that not even omnipotent

²⁸ One particularly frisky move is to ascribe *all* evil in the world, including the so-called natural evils, to the misuse of freedom, whether human or demonic. For a classic statement of this move, see Plantinga 1967, 149–151.

God can create *them* with a “wintellect.” If so, then no matter how much of God’s goodness the world presents to their intellects, the wills of some of them might fail to respond with love for him. Their love must be given freely if it is to be given at all.

This last claim may seem to contradict Frankfurt’s **Involuntariness** claim. And there seems to be something correct about **Involuntariness**; love is famously beyond our direct and immediate control. But here is Frankfurt’s diagnosis of why this is so:

Now the necessity that is characteristic of love does not constrain the movements of the will through an imperious surge of passion or compulsion by which the will is defeated and subdued. On the contrary, the constraint operates from within our own will itself. It is by our own will, and not by any external or alien force, that we are constrained.²⁹

As Frankfurt understands **Involuntariness**, what makes love impossible to lodge (or dislodge) directly or immediately is the fact that love entails the endorsement of a suite of the lover’s first-order desires. Lovers love to love what they love. I shall leave it as an exercise for the reader to determine whether **Involuntariness** is at odds with giving love freely.

What is clear is that if God chooses to create beings like us, seeking reciprocation of his love, he exposes himself to the risk of unrequited love. Or does he? Not so, according to Frankfurt; God is immune from **Vulnerability**: “For an infinite being, whose omnipotence makes it absolutely secure, even the most indiscriminate loving is safe. God need not be cautious. He runs no risks.”³⁰

In reply, let me call in Andrea one last time. Let us suppose that once Andrea lets go of one of his prized violins, he cannot guarantee that it will not be misused. But if he hoards it to himself, it will never have the opportunity to flourish in its own proper way, and he will lose the opportunity to rejoice in its flourishing. Still, there is always the palpable risk that as he monitors a particular violin’s vicissitudes, Andrea will experience anger, disappointment, regret, perhaps even grief over what might have been but never will be. God faces similar vulnerabilities in creating willful beings who may or may not return his love. And recall that returning God’s love includes loving one’s neighbor. Andrea might take some small consolation in the fact that his instruments are incapable of despoiling or destroying themselves or other instruments. Omnipotence confers many immunities, but not immunity from a heavy heart.

²⁹ Frankfurt 2004, 46.

³⁰ Frankfurt 2004, 62.

IX. A Glimpse Beyond

It remains to be explained how creatures are supposed to return God's love. For obvious reasons it cannot be the kind of solicitous love that craftspersons might have for their products or parents for their children. It seems simultaneously presumptuous and inadequate to suppose that creatures might befriend God. Presumptuous, if Aristotle is right, because if the disparity in virtue, vice, power, or anything else is too great between two parties, then the weaker party cannot expect to befriend the stronger.³¹ Inadequate, because, according to Scripture, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength: I doubt that friends can or should muster that kind of intensity towards each other.³² In *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams has argued for a conception of love of God as admiration of excellence. There is something attractive about this conception.³³ I am inclined to think, however, that its account of motivation needs further support to show how admiration can be turned into allegiance. That is a subject for another chapter.³⁴

Bibliography

- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1994. *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1999. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 1971. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy* 68: 5–20.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 2004. *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kolodny, Niko. 2003. "Love as Valuing a Relationship." *Philosophical Review* 112: 135–189.
- Kretzmann, Norman. 1991a. "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?" In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald, 208–228. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Kretzmann, Norman. 1991b. "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald, 229–249. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Leibniz, Gottfried. 1989. *Philosophical Essays*. Edited and translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Lewis, David. 1973. *Counterfactuals*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Mann, William E. 1982. "Divine Simplicity." *Religious Studies* 18: 451–471. Reprinted as Chapter 2 of this volume.

³¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.7, 1159a 33–35.

³² Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27.

³³ See, for example, Mann 2005, 293–295.

³⁴ An earlier version of this chapter benefitted from comments by Kevin Timpe.

- Mann, William E. 1991. "The Best of All Possible Worlds." In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Scott MacDonald, 259–268. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Reprinted as Chapter 11 of this volume.
- Mann, William E. 2005. "Theism and the Foundations of Ethics." In *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William E. Mann, 283–304. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Reprinted as Chapter 12 of this volume.
- Plantinga, Alvin. 1967. *God and Other Minds*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Rowe, William. 2004. *Can God Be Free?* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stump, Eleonore. 2003. *Aquinas*. New York: Routledge.
- Stump, Eleonore. 2006. "Love, by All Accounts." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80: 25–43.
- Stump, Eleonore, and Norman Kretzmann. 1981. "Eternity." *Journal of Philosophy* 78: 429–458.
- Stump, Eleonore, and Norman Kretzmann. 1985. "Absolute Simplicity." *Faith and Philosophy* 2: 353–382.
- Velleman, J. David. 1999. "Love as a Moral Emotion." *Ethics* 109: 338–374.

Jephthah's Plight

Moral Dilemmas and Theism

Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, "If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, and I will offer him up for a burnt offering." So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand. And he smote them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramin, with a very great slaughter. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And when he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me; for I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow." And she said to him, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone forth from your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites."

—Judges 11:29–36, *Revised Standard Version*

An agent is in a moral dilemma if, no matter what he does, he does something wrong. This characterization can stand some refinement, but it is clear enough as it stands for us to ask the most controversial question about moral dilemmas: *Are there any?* I wish to rephrase that question from a particular perspective: Do theists have a special stake in whether there are moral dilemmas? My answer is quintessentially philosophical: Yes and No. Yes, the existence of moral dilemmas should influence the way in which theists think about faith and morality. No, the existence of moral dilemmas does not pose a threat or a scandal to theism.

I think that there are moral dilemmas. Other philosophers disagree. It might seem that the way to settle our disagreement is to hunt for an example. If we find one, I am right; if we do not, after a thorough search, I am wrong. But things are never that simple in philosophy. For one thing, the question is really whether moral dilemmas are so much as *possible*. The literature on the topic abounds with discussions of cases drawn from fiction, and no one dismisses them as beside the point.¹ Thus the mission of the person who denies the existence of moral dilemmas is not merely to show that we have not yet uncovered one. It is rather to argue that their existence is somehow strongly precluded. Such a person might argue, for instance, that moral dilemmas are logically impossible or incompatible with principles known to be true. A theist who denies moral dilemmas might argue that even if they would be possible in a world without God, they are nevertheless precluded in the actual world by divine providence. Therefore, any case put forward as a candidate for a moral dilemma will be avidly disputed.

I shall discuss two major issues concerning theism and the existence of moral dilemmas. This first is the thesis that if there are moral dilemmas, they are always the result of previous culpable wrongdoing. The thesis is attractive to theists because it appears to be a corollary of the more general claim that providential God will never force the righteous to sin. Even so, it seems to be false as a matter of fact. The thesis has been attributed to no less an authority than Saint Thomas Aquinas. I shall argue that he does not hold it. The second issue devolves from the first. I shall suggest that the denial of the thesis, rather than damaging theistic ethical theory, deepens our understanding of some of its most distinctive features. But first I need to set the stage.

I. First Things

I have chosen for my example the plight of Jephthah, narrated in the Book of Judges. His rash vow and subsequent events would seem to place him in the following dilemma. If he sacrifices his daughter, then he does something wrong by violating the Decalogue commandment that forbids killing. If he does not sacrifice his daughter, then he does something wrong by not fulfilling his vow to the Lord. So no matter what he does, he does something wrong.

Or does he? In order to evaluate Jephthah's case from a theistic perspective, we need a somewhat more precise notion of a moral dilemma. And we need a specimen theist.

¹ See the essays and references cited in Gowans 1987a. For a detailed discussion of a case drawn from fiction, namely, Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence*, see Quinn 1989.

If there are any moral dilemmas, they might come in two varieties. On the one hand, a person might be in the position of being required to perform two actions whose joint performance is impossible. Having made two separate, simultaneous, symmetrical promises to Baker and Charlie to loan a sum of money, Abel may find that he is able to honor only one of the promises. There is nothing wrong in Abel's loaning the sum to Baker, but there is something wrong in his failing to loan the sum to Charlie. Abel's problem is that he has *too many obligatory* actions to perform. On the other hand, a person might confront a situation in which two courses of action are forbidden, yet the person cannot avoid performing one of them. Here the agent has *too few permissible* actions to perform. Jephthah's plight is a candidate for this sort of dilemma. Let us define the notions of a "weak moral n -lemma" and a "strong moral n -lemma":

An agent, x , is in a weak moral n -lemma if and only if (1) there are n alternative actions open to x and (2) for each alternative action, ϕ , open to x , if x does ϕ then x fails to do something that x ought to do.

An agent, x , is in a strong moral n -lemma if and only if (1) there are n alternative actions open to x and (2) for each alternative action, ϕ , open to x , if x does ϕ then x does something that x ought not to do.

" N -lemma" is a barbarism whose only excuse for existing is to point out that moral dilemmas are but one family in a clan of predicaments: there could be moral trilemmas, tetralemmas, and so on. One might try to reduce all cases of $n > 2$ to cases of $n = 2$ by regimenting them into the form "either alternative ϕ or alternative not- ϕ ," where to choose not- ϕ just is to choose one of the other alternatives from the actions comprising the n -lemma. There is a problem, on the surface at least, with the reduction. Suppose that x has an indivisible good and has promised simultaneously to give it to y , z , and w . Then to represent x 's predicament as a choice between, say, y and not- y is unfair to z 's and w 's chances if the predicament is to be resolved by a coin flip. No doubt much more can be said about the prospects for the reduction, but we need not pursue the issues further here.

An alternative action is open to x if it is in x 's power to perform the action in question, which implies that x has the ability to perform the action (that sort of action is in x 's repertoire) and the opportunity to perform it on the occasion in question (nothing is preventing x from exercising the ability). If one assumes that omissions are actions, then one may say that on some occasions an alternative to ϕ is just to do nothing.

Some may wish to argue that the distinction between weak and strong moral dilemmas is merely a surface distinction. Given three principles, one can show that every weak dilemma is really a strong dilemma. Suppose that

every omission is an action; more specifically, that (i) if x omits or fails to do some action, ψ , then x does not- ψ . Suppose further that (ii) if x ought to do ψ , then it is not permissible that x do not- ψ . Finally, suppose that (iii) if it is not permissible that x do not- ψ , then x ought not to do not- ψ . Then consider the consequent in clause (2) of the definition of a weak moral dilemma: “ x fails to do something that x ought to do.” Let ψ be any alternative action that x fails to do but ought to do. By the first principle, x does not- ψ . Since x ought to do ψ , the second principle implies that it is not permissible that x do not- ψ . But if it is not permissible that x do not- ψ , the third principle implies that x ought not to do not- ψ . Thus x does something (namely, not- ψ) that x ought not to do. Thus in virtue of the three principles, “ x fails to do something that x ought to do” implies “ x does something that x ought not to do,” which is the consequent of clause (2) of the definition of a strong moral dilemma. Since the two definitions differ only in respect of this consequent, the three principles yield the result that every weak dilemma is a strong dilemma.

The three principles deserve more critical scrutiny than I shall give them here. Since I shall focus our attention on strong moral dilemmas in the remainder of the chapter, it would not distress me if it turned out that every weak dilemma is a strong dilemma. Even so, one should not accept that result if it rests on dubious principles. It is not obvious that principle (i) captures the sense of the doctrine that omissions are actions. I am inclined to think that the converse of that doctrine, that actions are omissions, is false. Yet the converse of principle (i), if x does not- ψ then x omits to do ψ , seems true. Principles (ii) and (iii) together give the biconditional principle that x ought to do ψ if and only if it is not permissible that x do not- ψ . This biconditional is a variation of part of a familiar principle of deontic logic, the so-called interdefinability of “is obligatory” and “is permissible.” In the context of discussions of moral dilemmas, however, one ought to watch this principle carefully.²

There may be dilemmas that are irreducibly religious in character; that is, dilemmas that cannot be analyzed as moral or as any other kind of dilemma. There may also be dilemmas that pit a religious requirement against a moral requirement.³ I believe that nothing in this chapter precludes those possibilities.

² See Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, pp. 156–161, for an interpretation that falsifies part of the interdefinability thesis.

³ Quinn 1986 argues that the case of Abraham and Isaac is best viewed as a case of “Kierkegaardian conflict,” in which an indefeasible religious requirement, imposed by God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, conflicts with a moral requirement—not to sacrifice an innocent child—that is not overridden by any state of affairs. On this interpretation, the Abraham and Isaac case is not a pure moral dilemma but rather a dilemma between two incommensurable realms of value. This interpretation is compatible with the belief that there are moral dilemmas and compatible with the belief that there are not.

But the notion of *n*-lemma that I have defined is to be understood specifically as a moral notion. Moreover, the specimen theist I am about to introduce holds views that locate the source of morality in God.

The theist I have in mind—let us call her “Agnes”—believes that God exists and is the omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, and providential creator and sustainer of the world. Agnes further believes that there are absolute principles of rightness and wrongness, binding on all peoples at all times: love of one’s neighbor is right; murder is wrong. Finally, Agnes believes that God’s relation to these moral principles is not adventitious. It is not as if God merely sees the long-range good tendencies of neighborly love, the long-range bad tendencies of murder, and gives us helpful hints on which courses of action to follow. It is rather that the moral principles are part of the expressive content of the will of God, an all-knowing being whose will is perfectly good. Agnes thus holds a view about moral rightness and wrongness that is sometimes called theological voluntarism and sometimes called a divine command theory. Agnes may not be too happy with either title. “Theological voluntarism” can conjure up images of a God who might have approved of just any kind of action, including murder, and who might have disapproved of just any kind of action, including neighborly love. Agnes’s view is that God’s wisdom and God’s love play an important role in shaping God’s will. “Divine command theory,” on the other hand, can suggest that commands are the only means God uses in communicating moral knowledge to us, along with the corollary that our having moral knowledge is simply a matter of our obediently accepting such commands. Agnes’s view is that there are all sorts of ways in which God can make his will known to us, including the enablement of our capacity for practical reason. We need not specify Agnes’s views in any further detail; it is better if we leave them in a fairly generic form.⁴ What is important for Agnes is that the content of morality is dependent ultimately on God’s willing, knowing, and loving activity.

The constellation of Agnes’s views about God and morality should force her to think seriously about moral dilemmas, since it is not obvious that her views leave room for their possibility. When Agnes comes to read the Book of Judges, what should she think about the story of Jephthah’s vow and its aftermath?

Agnes might begin by comparing Jephthah’s plight with the story of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:1–14). There are more differences than similarities, however. In both cases a father is placed in the position of having to sacrifice an only child in order to fulfill an obligation to God. In both cases it is obvious to the father that the sacrifice must be made. In both cases the certitude is

⁴ For a sampling of different views, see Quinn 1978; Quinn 1979; Adams 1987, essays 7 and 9; and Mann 1989.

vouchsafed by an intimate encounter between God and a righteous man. (Referring to Hebrews 11:32, Aquinas says that Jephthah is included among the saints.) Nevertheless, the obligations are incurred in different ways. Abraham is commanded directly by God to sacrifice Isaac. Jephthah's obligation arises from the vow he made to God. God (or his messenger) intervenes at crucial junctures of the episode of Abraham and Isaac. In Jephthah's case God's only overt role is to fill Jephthah with the enthusiasm to make the vow. The identity of the sacrificial victim is known from the start in Genesis and discovered with anguish only at the denouement in Judges. Finally, Abraham's sacrifice is prevented by God, while God does nothing to stop Jephthah from sacrificing his daughter.

One might think that the salient similarity in both cases is that Abraham and Jephthah both know what they must do. Neither of them takes himself to be in a dilemma. Jephthah's behavior on seeing his daughter emerge from his house is the behavior of a person unable to face the horrible consequences of his act, not the behavior of a person caught in the toils of moral predicament. So it might seem that if Jephthah knows what he must do, then he cannot be in a dilemma.

But this conditional proposition comes close to begging the question. For if Jephthah is in a genuine dilemma, and he knows it, then he will know what he must do, namely, sacrifice his daughter, *and* he will know what he must *not* do, namely, sacrifice his daughter. Thus the fact that Jephthah knows what he must do does not entail that he is not in a dilemma. In similar fashion, Jephthah's not taking himself to be in a dilemma is compatible with his being in a dilemma nevertheless, just as an agent can believe himself to be free when he is not.

There is a temporal difference between the episode of Abraham and Isaac and the episode of Jephthah and his daughter, a difference that might seem to be significant to someone like Agnes. P. T. Geach has claimed that Abraham was not in a "bind" with respect to God's command to sacrifice Isaac because "a schoolboy of Macaulay's day would know . . . that the Decalogue could not worry Abraham, since it was promulgated long after his death" (Geach 1980, p. 181). Perhaps Geach believes that a person cannot be confronted with a moral dilemma, that is, with a choice between alternative wrong courses of action, until God has promulgated the relevant commandments. Even if that belief were plausible, it would not help in Jephthah's case: a schoolboy of Macaulay's day would know that Jephthah's case *postdates* the promulgation of the Decalogue. Moreover, the belief is not plausible, not to a thoughtful defender of divine command morality. God punishes Cain for slaying Abel, even though the homicide antedates the promulgation of the Decalogue (and the existence of Abraham and Isaac). No defender of divine command morality need

suppose that murder, adultery, theft, and perjury were permissible until the time of the promulgation of the Ten Commandments. Murder is wrong because it is contrary to the will of God, but that does not entail that one cannot know that murder is wrong until God does something as dramatic as issuing the Ten Commandments.

II. *Secundum Quid*

At first blush it might seem to Agnes that a providential God could have arranged things so that his creatures would never have to face genuinely dilemmatic situations. At second blush it might occur to her that there are limits to what even an omnipotent God can do if he is going to have creatures who are significantly free. As providential, he will endow us with sufficient intellectual and moral capacities and furnish us with a commodious environment. He will give us moral principles that are within our capacity to follow. Our freedom, however, which is part of our endowment, entails the ability to ignore or flout those moral principles. Once an agent violates one of the principles, all bets are off about whether it will be possible for her subsequently to follow all the principles that she could have followed had she not initially violated one of the principles. "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive," to which we may lamely add, "Or kill or covet, cheat or thief."

A nonmoral analogy may be useful. Suppose you are consigned to playing second, or **O**s, in tic-tac-toe. Your primary goal is not to lose; your secondary goal is to win, whenever possible. There is an algorithm which, if followed, will insure against losing. *Part* of the algorithm is given in the following two rules:

- R1. Whenever it is your turn and your opponent has two **X**s in the same (horizontal, vertical, or diagonal) row, place your **O** so as to block your opponent from completing the row.
- R2. If your opponent's first move is to place an **X** in the center cell, place your **O** in one of the four corner cells.

Suppose that your opponent places an **X** in the center cell and that you do not follow R2; instead, you place your **O** in one of the four side cells. If your opponent now plays optimally, you are doomed. There will come a point, after your opponent places the third **X**, at which you will be confronted with two unblocked rows, each containing two **X**s. You should block the first row, but you cannot do that without leaving the second row unblocked. You should block the second row, but then you leave the first row unblocked. No matter what you do, you leave something undone, something that results in your losing. Your

tic-tac-toe quandary is analogous to a weak moral dilemma. The fault is not with the rules constituting the algorithm. The problem is that your earlier failure to follow R2 brings about a situation in which you are stuck.

Your opponent need not play optimally, of course; your not following the algorithm only puts you at risk. Similarly, the world need not react in such a way that on every occasion of an agent's wrongdoing, the agent is subsequently confronted with a dilemma whose cause can be traced back to the wrongdoing. Some philosophers have maintained, however, that *all* moral dilemmas—weak ones and strong ones—are like your hypothetical predicament at tic-tac-toe: something wrong done by the agent is responsible for the dilemma the agent now faces. Every moral dilemma is a dilemma *secundum quid*, it is said; no moral dilemma is a dilemma *simpliciter*. Present defenders of this strategy derive the terminology from Aquinas and claim him as a confrere.⁵ Alan Donagan's articulation of the distinction is useful.

A moral system allows perplexity (or conflict of duties) *simpliciter* if and only if situations to which it applies are possible, in which somebody would find himself able to obey one of its precepts only if he violated another, even though he had up to then obeyed all of them. For reasons already given, Aquinas held that any moral system that allows perplexity *simpliciter* must be inconsistent. By contrast, a system allows perplexity (or conflict of duties) *secundum quid* if and only if situations to which it applies are possible in which, as a result of violating one or more of its precepts, somebody would find that there is a precept he can obey only if he violates another. (Donagan 1984, in Gowans 1987a, p. 285)

The thesis is, then, that every case of a moral dilemma for an agent has a causal ancestry containing at least one wrongdoing on the part of the agent which is connected in a relevant way, one presumes, to the ensuing dilemma. I take it that propounders of the thesis do not think that its truth is guaranteed by the doctrine of original sin. According to a common version of that doctrine, we are all in such a fallen state that, without supernatural aid, it is not possible for us always to refrain from acting sinfully. If the doctrine of original sin is true, then our fallen state is our common heritage, the lamentable, all-pervasive

⁵ Von Wright 1968, p. 81, attributes the strategy to Aquinas and credits Geach with calling his attention to it. Geach 1969, p. 128, endorses the strategy, attributing its truth to God's providence. Donagan 1977, pp. 144–145, Donagan 1984, in Gowans 1987a, pp. 285–286, MacIntyre 1984, p. 179, MacIntyre 1988, pp. 185–187, Gowans 1987b, p. 5, and Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, pp. 102–103, also attribute the strategy to Aquinas. Von Wright, Donagan, Gowans, and Sinnott-Armstrong cite the same passages from Aquinas in support of the attribution.

backdrop against which we play out our lives. It is one thing to say that all of us, left to our natural devices, are bound to sin. It is another thing to say that all of us are bound to end up in dilemmas *secundum quid*. Even if one believes the latter claim—and there is no indication that defenders of the thesis do—one can still insist that the proper explanation of *secundum quid* dilemmas must include reference to a personal wrongdoing, not merely to a faulty condition.

Agnes may wonder how to apply the thesis to the case of Jephthah. The salient action prior to Jephthah's homecoming is his vow to the Lord. Although the product of rash enthusiasm, the vow can hardly be counted as intrinsically wrong, especially since it was made after the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. Is it to be counted as wrong nevertheless, just because it led to the tragic denouement at homecoming? This approach has all the advantages of theft over honest toil. It makes the *secundum quid* thesis rousingly successful: the only *simpliciter* dilemmas it would not thus automatically convert into *secundum quid* dilemmas would be those—if any such are possible—in which an agent faces a moral dilemma having made no previous decisions whatsoever. The price of success is exorbitant,⁶ although that is not to say that no consequentialist will pay it. Thus, it seems unpromising to attempt to categorize Jephthah's case as a dilemma *secundum quid*. But on the thesis that all moral dilemmas are dilemmas *secundum quid*, it then follows that Jephthah's plight is no dilemma at all. But Jephthah's plight certainly looks like a dilemma, and if it is not plausible to classify it as *secundum quid*, then it must be *simpliciter*.

The thesis that all dilemmas are *secundum quid* would have some claim on Agnes's credulity if it had been held by as profound a thinker as Aquinas. But in fact Aquinas does not hold the thesis. He does acknowledge that *some* dilemmas are *secundum quid*. Recent discussions of Aquinas's views cite four passages, one from the *Disputed Questions on Truth* and three from the *Summa Theologiae*.⁷ The *De Veritate* passage discusses an example that recurs in the

⁶ If the principle is that *any* action that leads to a moral dilemma is wrong, then God's allowing Jephthah to defeat the Ammonites is wrong. If the principle is that any action *of an agent* that leads to a moral dilemma *for the agent* is wrong, then it runs afoul of any sort of case in which the action brings about a great good while leading to a trivial dilemma (such as being committed to mowing two lawns at the same time). If the principle is that any action of the agent that leads to a *great* moral dilemma for the agent is wrong, then we may ask whether that action remains wrong in circumstances in which choosing one horn of the dilemma leads to an even greater good. When, if ever, is an action irrevocably right or irrevocably wrong for a consequentialist?

⁷ The passages are in *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 4, obj. 8 and reply; *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, q. 19, a. 6, obj. 3 and reply; IIaIIae, q. 62, a. 2, obj. 2; IIIa, q. 64, a. 6, obj. 3 and reply. (All subsequent references to the *Summa Theologiae* will cite only part, question, article, and objection numbers. I have used the Latin texts in Aquinas 1980.) See von Wright 1968, p. 81n (who does not cite the third passage); Donagan 1977, p. 254, n. 3; Donagan 1984, in Gowans 1987a, p. 290, n. 17; Gowans 1987b, p. 31, n. 2; Santurri 1987, p. 223, nn. 23 and 25.

first of the three *Summa* passages. Thus, three different examples are supposed to provide the data for the thesis that Aquinas believes that *all* dilemmas are dilemmas *secundum quid*. Since the myth that Aquinas held the thesis has become pervasive in the recent literature, it is high time to debunk it. The three examples themselves are more subtle than the commentators seem to realize. And there are other examples to be found in Aquinas's writings which, when examined, have the cumulative effect of undermining the attribution of any reductionistic thesis to Aquinas.

Aquinas reserves the term *perplexus* for dilemmatic situations. But he does not apply it to all dilemmas; the last case we shall examine makes no use of that term or its cognates. Nine of the ten examples we shall examine occur in the context of "objections"; the other occurs in the context of a reply to an objection. Aquinas's policy with objections is to resolve them. That fact by itself, however, does not entail the conclusion that Aquinas thinks that there are no dilemmas nor the conclusion that if there are any, they are all *secundum quid*. Quite often, as Aquinas recognizes, an objection rests on a valid point.

The three examples usually cited are the following:

- (A) Aquinas believes that any act of will that goes against the agent's reason, whether that reason is correct or mistaken, is evil.⁸ Suppose, then, that a person sincerely but mistakenly believes that he ought to commit adultery. If he commits adultery, then he does something wrong by violating a law of God. If he does not commit adultery, then he does something wrong by acting against his conscience. (*De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 4, obj. 8 and reply; IaIIae, q. 19, a. 6, obj. 3)
- (B) Restitution for what has been taken from another is necessary for one's salvation. Suppose that a person has ruined another's reputation by telling the truth and that she can now only restore the reputation by lying. If she mendaciously restores the other's reputation in order to make restitution, then she does something wrong. If she does not restore the person's reputation, then she does something wrong by not making restitution. (IIaIIae, q. 62, a. 2, obj. 2)
- (C) A priest in a state of sin sins in administering the sacraments. Suppose that a sinful priest is confronted with a dying, unbaptized baby. If he baptizes the baby, he sins by his administering the sacrament. If he does not, he sins by allowing the baby to die unbaptized. (IIIa, q. 64, a. 6, obj. 3)⁹

⁸ *De Veritate*, q. 17, a. 3; IaIIae, q. 19, a. 5.

⁹ Aquinas discusses other variations on the type (C) example. Thus, it is not lawful for a priest to refrain altogether from consecrating the Eucharist, but it is also not lawful for a sinful or excommunicated priest to consecrate the Eucharist (IIIa, q. 82, a. 10, obj. 2).

Let us consider cases (A) and (C) first. Edmund N. Santurri has recently argued that, so far from contributing to the thesis that dilemmas are merely *secundum quid*, Aquinas's treatment of cases like (A) and (C) shows that he does not regard these cases as dilemmas.¹⁰ In both cases, Aquinas says, there is something the agent can do to extricate himself. The sincerely intending adulterer can give up his mistaken belief; the priest in a state of sin can repent. On Santurri's analysis, the agents are confronted not with dilemmas but rather with threefold choices, one option of which is a permissible alternative. But this analysis fails to appreciate the point of the *secundum quid* thesis. To say that a person faces a dilemma *secundum quid* is to say that the person faces a dilemma brought about by some culpable condition of the person and that the dilemma endures as long as the person remains in that condition. The adulterer's culpably mistaken belief or the priest's sinful condition is the *quid* following which the agent faces a dilemma. What Santurri takes to be a third alternative just is the action that will rectify the condition and extricate the agent from the situation, thus showing it to be one kind of *secundum quid* dilemma.

An agent, x , is in a *secundum quid* dilemma if and only if x faces a dilemma because x is in a culpable condition for which x is responsible. Sometimes, as cases (A) and (C) show, x can reverse or put aside the condition. But case (B) is significantly different. Aquinas's resolution of case (B)—the case of one person's ruining the reputation of another by telling the truth—depends on a distinction between whether the agent told the truth justly or unjustly. If she told the truth justly, then she is not bound to make restitution. If she told the truth unjustly (by betraying a confidence, for example) and if she cannot now undo the harm done except by lying, then she must not lie but must make compensation in some other way to be determined by an arbiter (IIaIIae, q. 62, a. 2, *ad 2*).

If the agent told the truth justly, case (B) is not a dilemma *secundum quid* because it is not a dilemma of any kind. In that case, it is irrelevant to cite it as evidence. If the agent told the truth unjustly and cannot undo the harm done without doing something else that is wrong, then case (B) is unlike cases (A) and (C). In those cases the agent can dissolve the dilemma: there is something he can do now, the doing of which is permissible and will enable him to escape the horns of the dilemma *in prospect*, before he chooses one of the forbidden horns. In contrast, if the agent in case (B) is an unjust truth teller, then she is not confronting a dilemma in prospect; she is already immersed in a continuing dilemma from which she cannot inculpably extricate herself. She ought to restore the person's reputation, she cannot do that without lying, and she

¹⁰ Santurri 1987, pp. 91–94. Santurri infers, invalidly, that Aquinas's position is that there are no moral dilemmas *secundum quid* or *simpliciter*.

ought not to lie. Aquinas's solution, to make recompense in some other way, is not put forward as a way of dissolving the dilemma. It presupposes the dilemma's indissolubility—that is, the unavoidable continued wrongdoing of the agent—and proposes a way of repairing the rent thus created in the moral fabric.¹¹ There is thus an enduring feature to case (B). Nothing the agent does now or in the future can count as a permissible *restoration* of the other person's reputation. Compensation is thus a *pis aller*, a substitute for restoration. Its character as a substitute is a reminder of the permanent irreversibility of some dilemmas.

Let us say that an agent, x , is in a *soft* moral dilemma if (but not only if) (1) x is in the dilemma only because of some wrongful or mistaken condition on x 's part, (2) x can still do something, ϕ , permissible in itself, to alter or renounce the condition, and (3) x 's doing ϕ would enable x to avoid both horns of the dilemma. (It may be, for all of this, that x does not know that the dilemma is avoidable or even that there is a dilemma.) Let us say that a moral dilemma is *hard* if and only if it is not soft. Thus if x is in a hard dilemma, then it is not the case that all three conditions apply to x 's situation. The agents in cases (A) and (C) are in soft *secundum quid* dilemmas. The unjust truth teller in case (B) appears to be in a hard *secundum quid* dilemma, or, to put it more cautiously, if it is soft, it is not soft in virtue of the above sufficient conditions (1)–(3). There just is no relevant condition of the agent such that she can alter or renounce it and thereby avoid the dilemma.

The most we have shown so far is that there may be two kinds of dilemma *secundum quid*; this should not in itself disturb a defender of the *secundum quid* strategy. Let us turn our attention, however, to a family of four cases from near the end of the *Summa*. The cases involve unforeseen flaws in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

- (D1) A priest might suddenly recall, during the consecration, that he has not fasted, or not confessed a sin, or even that he has been excommunicated. He sins if he continues the consecration and he sins if he discontinues it. (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, obj. 2)
- (D2) A priest might discover, after consecrating the wine, that it has been poisoned. If he drinks the wine, he sins either by committing suicide or by tempting God, that is, by doing something in order to test God's power, goodness, or knowledge.¹² If he does not drink it, he sins by violating an ecclesiastical statute. (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, obj. 3)

¹¹ Note that case (B), cited but not examined by Santurri, cannot be assimilated to the analysis he proposes, even if the analysis were unobjectionable in other respects.

¹² On the sin of tempting God, see IIaIIae, q. 97.

- (D3) A priest might discover, after the consecration, that the server did not pour wine into the chalice. Once again, he sins if he continues and he sins if he stops. (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, obj. 4)
- (D4) A priest might not recall whether he has said the words of consecration. If he has in fact omitted them and does not say them, he sins by invalidating the service. If he has not omitted them and repeats them, he also sins by invalidating the service. (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, obj. 5)

Case (D1) fits the pattern of cases (A) and (C). According to Aquinas, if after the consecration a priest recalls, for example, that he is in a state of sin, he ought to repent inwardly, with the intention of confessing and making satisfaction, and continue the sacrament (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, *ad 2*). Consider, however, cases (D2), (D3), and (D4). If they are dilemmas at all, then they are dilemmas without fault on the part of the agent. What is absent from (D2), (D3), and (D4) is any mention of the *secundum quid* apparatus. By hypothesis, the priest has done nothing relevantly wrong; he is not in a sinful state. Aquinas describes each case as an apparent dilemma. In each case he prescribes a course of action for the priest to follow. (D2) The poisoned wine must not be drunk; it should be placed in a vessel and kept with the relics (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, *ad 3*). (D3) If the priest discovers that there is no wine in the chalice, he should redo whatever needs to be done to ensure that the sacrament is performed in perfect order (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, *ad 4*). (D4) If the words the priest thinks he has forgotten to say are not necessary for the sacrament, he should not say them now; if they are, he should (IIIa, q. 83, a. 6, *ad 5*). Aquinas's prescriptions and the context in which they occur suggest that in each case he is prescribing the one course of action that will prevent a defective situation from getting worse. But that does not allow us to infer that he thinks that the situations are not genuine dilemmas. Nor does he say in the replies that it was a mistake to think of them as dilemmas. It is natural for a person to think that precisely because such genuine dilemmatic situations can arise, it is important to have prescriptions to cover them, even though the function of the prescriptions can only be to allow one to prevent things from worsening, not to allow one to avoid doing something that is wrong.

Suppose, as the evidence indicates, that Aquinas does regard cases (D2), (D3), and (D4) as genuine dilemmas. Then we could suggest another way in which a dilemma can be soft. Agent x is in a soft dilemma if (but not only if) (1) x is in the dilemma through no wrongful action or mistaken condition on x 's part, (2) there is some action, ϕ , that x can do such that x 's doing ϕ entails that x grasps one horn of the dilemma, and (3) x 's doing ϕ prevents a defective situation from getting worse. (Once again we can say that if x is in a hard dilemma, then not all three of these conditions hold true of x 's situation.) On the

supposition that Aquinas regards cases (D2), (D3), and (D4) as dilemmas, we could say that they are *soft simpliciter* dilemmas. That is, they are dilemmas involving no fault on the part of the agent, to be handled by the agent's doing something that is wrong in itself but that stems further worse results.

The last three cases involve Aquinas's discussion of oaths and vows.

- (E) Not to fulfill a promise made under oath is a case of the sin of perjury. Suppose that a person swears to commit murder. If she commits the murder, then she sins. If she does not commit the murder, then she sins by committing perjury. (IIaIIae, q. 98, a. 2, obj. 1)

If Aquinas had a general strategy that regimented all apparent *simpliciter* dilemmas into *secundum quid* dilemmas, one would have expected to see that strategy deployed especially in case (E). It would have been extremely plausible to say that the agent is in a dilemma *secundum* her wrongful oath. But in fact Aquinas does not analyze case (E) along those lines. His determination of case (E) is that it is not a dilemma because no legitimate oath has been sworn.

To swear an oath is to invoke God as a witness. A *declaratory* oath concerns past or present matters; a *promissory* oath is taken with regard to the future (IIaIIae, q. 89, a. 1). An oath must meet three conditions in order to be good. The oath must be the result of *judgment* or discretion on the part of the oath taker. The oath must not be false but *true*. And the oath must be *just*, not sinful or unlawful (IIaIIae, q. 89, a. 3). Of the three conditions on oaths, truth—more precisely, its opposite, falsity—is essential and most important to perjury. Even the person who swears that something is true, believing it to be false when in fact it *is* true, has sworn to something formally false (false as apprehended by the person) but materially true (IIaIIae, q. 98, a. 1, *ad* 3). Justice is the second most important condition, but in the case of perjury with respect to a promissory oath, Aquinas connects absence of justice to falsity: “For whoever swears to something unlawful incurs falsity by that very fact, because he is obligated to do what is contrary” (IIaIIae, q. 98, a. 1, *ad* 1).¹³ I believe that what Aquinas has in mind is this. The notions of truth and falsity as they apply to promissory oaths have to do not with what *will* be so much as they have to do with what *ought* to be and what *ought* to be done. That is, Aquinas thinks that to swear to do something wrong is unjust because it is swearing to *make* true what ought to be left false.

We are now in a position to understand Aquinas's determination of case (E). The person who swears to commit murder by that very fact commits perjury

¹³ The least important condition on perjury is lack of judgment, because it only puts one in danger of falsity (IIaIIae, q. 98, a. 1, *ad* 1).

through a defect of justice (IIaIIae, q. 98, a. 2, *ad* 1). That is, she swears to make true what she ought to leave false. She is obligated not to keep the oath (cf. IIaIIae, q. 89, a. 7; a. 9, *ad* 3). She is not in a dilemma, however, because she is not also obligated to keep the oath. Her failing to keep the oath is not a case of perjury, because what she swears to do is “not the sort of thing that could fall under an oath” (IIaIIae, q. 98, a. 2, *ad* 1). It is not as if she swears an illicit oath which then places her in a dilemma *secundum quid*. It is rather that the oath, if sworn, has no binding force, because it lacks truth cum justice.

The promissory oath in case (E) is vitiated because what is sworn to is something intrinsically wrong. Such cases are not *secundum quid* dilemmas; swearing to something that is intrinsically wrong creates no dilemma at all. It sometimes happens, though, that an oath, whose content is not intrinsically wrong, would result in evil, if kept, because of unforeseen circumstances.

- (F) Herod, captivated by the dancing of Herodias's daughter, swears to grant to her whatever she asks. She asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. (IIaIIae, q. 89, a. 7, *ad* 2)

Aquinas says of the case, “This oath could be lawful from the beginning, given an understood, requisite condition, namely, if she asked for what it would be right to give; but the fulfillment of the oath was unlawful” (IIaIIae, q. 89, a. 7, *ad* 2). It is wrong for Herod to carry out his oath, whose content began life as morally neutral. Is it also wrong for Herod *not* to carry out his oath? The determination of article 7 implies that it is not: “An oath should not be observed in that case in which there is sin or an obstacle to good.”

Defenders of the *secundum quid* thesis might rejoice in Aquinas's determinations of cases (E) and (F). They might point out in particular that case (F) is very much like Jephthah's plight, inasmuch as they both involve a promise whose unguarded liberality is the source of ensuing tragedy. Their joy would be premature. Let me introduce as case (G), the tenth and last case to be considered, Aquinas's discussion of Jephthah.

Unlike Herod's case of an imprudent oath, Jephthah's case involves a *vow*, and that difference is significant for Aquinas. There are three parties entailed by the structure of a promissory oath; namely, the promisor, the promisee, and the confirmatory witness to the oath; the witness is always God. The structure of a vow, in contrast, entails two parties, the promisor and the promisee, who is always God (IIaIIae, q. 88, a. 1).¹⁴ In an obvious way, a promisor's relation to God is more direct when the promise is a vow than when it is an oath. For that reason

¹⁴ Oaths and vows may involve beneficiaries, who may be distinct from the promisee. Whether there are beneficiaries depends not on the structure but on the content of the promise.

vows are more binding than oaths.¹⁵ To fail to keep a legitimate oath displays irreverence, but to break a vow is an instance not simply of irreverence but of infidelity to God, a form of betrayal that is the greatest kind of irreverence (IIaIIae, q. 89, a. 8). It is not surprising, then, that Aquinas's pronouncement about vows admits no class of permissible exceptions. Other sorts of promises require certain conditions in order to remain binding. In contrast, every vow made to God that is still within the agent's power to keep must be kept (IIaIIae, q. 88, a. 3). Thus Jephthah must keep his vow. Moreover, Jephthah's case cannot be assimilated to case (E)—a case of an oath vitiated by its content—because the content of Jephthah's vow is not something intrinsically wrong. In this respect, Jephthah's vow is more like Herod's oath. Indeed, Aquinas cites Jephthah's vow as an instance of a vow that is good considered in itself yet that has an evil result; such a vow should not be kept (IIaIIae, q. 88, a. 2, *ad 2*). Thus in two adjacent articles Aquinas either says or implies that it is wrong for Jephthah to keep his vow and wrong for him not to keep his vow. There is no reason to think that we have caught Thomas nodding. He himself provides the grounds for undercutting any attempt to turn Jephthah's case into a *secundum quid* dilemma. Not only does he say that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the vow, but he also explicitly adverts to the fact that Jephthah made the vow when the spirit of the Lord came upon him (IIaIIae, q. 88, a. 2, *ad 2*). Finally, we may note that unlike the (D2), (D3), and (D4) cases, there is no prescription offered to prevent a defective situation from worsening. The very idea of trying to develop such a prescription to apply to Jephthah's tragedy is, of course, daft. In sum, I submit that Aquinas's treatment of Jephthah's plight recognizes it as a hard *simpliciter* dilemma.

Aquinas's views about moral dilemmas are thus considerably more complex than contemporary philosophers have thought. Recall that there are two ways in which a dilemma can be soft, and let us assume that a dilemma is hard if it is not soft in either way. Without undue distortion we can then map the results of our examination of the ten cases onto the following grid.

	Soft	Hard
<i>Secundum Quid</i>	(A), (C), (D1)	(B) (truth unjustly told)
<i>Simpliciter</i>	(D2), (D3), (D4)	(G) (Jephthah)

(Cases (E) and (F) are not dilemmas.)

Defenders of the *secundum quid* thesis thus should not look to Aquinas for support. Nor should they rely on Donagan's claim that "Aquinas held that any

¹⁵ It is unclear whether Aquinas means that a vow to do something is always more binding than an oath to do the same thing or whether he intends the stronger thesis that any vow, no matter what its content, is more binding than any oath.

moral system that allows perplexity *simpliciter* must be inconsistent.” There are only two occasions on which, when discussing *perplexus*, Aquinas uses the term *impossibile*. One is the *De Veritate* discussion of case (A). The other is Aquinas’s discussion of the same issue raised in case (A)—whether a false conscience is binding—in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.¹⁶ Both works are earlier than the *Summa Theologiae*. In the *Summa* the term used is not *impossibile* but rather *inconueniens*. *Inconueniens* can sometimes be rendered as “inconsistent” when it occurs in medieval logical treatises, but in its garden-variety philosophical occurrences, it will bear no more weight than “unsuitable,” “unfitting,” “inappropriate,” “discordant,” or “awkward.” I conjecture that Aquinas came to realize that *impossibile* was too strong a term to use to characterize dilemmatic situations: *ab esse ad posse valet consequentia*. To be sure, Aquinas thinks that dilemmas are occasions in which something has gone awry, perhaps horribly awry. He does not think, however, that the source of the wryness is always a wrongdoing on the part of the agent.

III. *Tertium Datur*

What happens to theistic ethical theory if the prop of *secundum quid* dilemmas is removed? How should Agnes respond to the thought that there are genuine *simpliciter* dilemmas? There are two complementary strategies one might offer to Agnes. The first is to argue for the thesis that no adequate ethical theory, secular or theistic, will allow the existence of unresolvable moral dilemmas. (By the lights of the first strategy, to acknowledge that there are even *secundum quid* dilemmas is already a mistake.) The second strategy is to present a procedure whose application would show that all apparent dilemmas are only apparent. What I will suggest is that although Agnes may accept the strategies, she need not. I will then explore the consequences of her rejecting them.

We might think of ethical theory on the model of scientific theory. Two hallmarks of an adequate scientific theory are its capacities for prediction and explanation. The analogous functions in the realm of the practical would seem to be guidance and appraisal, respectively. Suppose that a particular scientific theory were such that with respect to some type of phenomenon, the theory’s laws predicted logically incompatible outcomes. With respect to this type of phenomenon, the theory would be useless as a predictive device. Our natural inclination would be to reject the theory as it stands: at a minimum we would regard the theory’s laws as incompletely expressed or flawed in some other way. Now suppose, by analogy, that an ethical theory were such that in a

¹⁶ Book II, Distinction 39, Question 3, article 3, objection 5.

certain kind of choice situation, the theory's principles told us that the agent ought to perform some action, ϕ , and ought to refrain from performing ϕ . Here we would be inclined to regard the theory as useless as a guide to the agent's behavior. The flaw in both cases seems to be a kind of inconsistency. It is then tempting to assimilate the practical inconsistency exhibited by the ethical theory case to the logical inconsistency exhibited in the scientific theory case. There is a popular argument used to effect the assimilation. Suppose that my ethical theory tells me that I ought to do ϕ and that I ought not to do ϕ . Then, by a seemingly obvious agglomeration principle and the principle that if one ought not to do ϕ , then one ought to do not- ϕ , it follows that I ought to do (ϕ and not- ϕ). Of course I cannot do (ϕ and not- ϕ). But "ought" implies "can," and so "not can" implies "not ought." Thus, if I cannot do (ϕ and not- ϕ), then it is not the case that I ought to do (ϕ and not- ϕ). It is contradictory to be told both that I ought to do (ϕ and not- ϕ) and that it is not the case that I ought to do (ϕ and not- ϕ). So if my ethical theory ever tells me that I ought to do ϕ and that I ought not to do ϕ , I can be sure that my ethical theory is logically inconsistent.¹⁷

The second strategy picks up at this point, offering a technique or a set of techniques for the repair of defective ethical theories. Some of the more salient tactics at the disposal of a practitioner of the second strategy are the following. *Distinguish between levels of appraisal.* The "ought" judgments giving rise to the apparent dilemma may be based on intuitive ethical principles that are efficient but only approximate. In cases in which there is conflict between such principles, one can appeal to a supreme principle of morality, which itself licenses the intuitive principles and which can be applied directly to recalcitrant cases.¹⁸ *Distinguish between different senses of the same moral term.* There may be a sense of "ought" according to which it can happen that I ought to do ϕ and that I ought to do not- ϕ . But there is another sense of "ought," tantamount to "morally best," according to which if I ought to do ϕ , then it cannot be the case that I ought also to do not- ϕ .¹⁹ One can go on to allege that dilemmas get off the ground only by confusing the first sense with the second. *Revise and refine moral principles.* Moral principles should be thought of as "open textured"; they apply to situations *ceteris paribus*. The appearance of dilemmas is a symptom that certain principles may need further refinement. Perhaps important exceptions and exclusions need to be built into them. Or perhaps metaprinciples should be developed that will either adjudicate between lower-order principles

¹⁷ See (page references are to Gowans 1987a) Williams 1973, pp. 129–134, McConnell 1978, pp. 155–156, Marcus 1980, pp. 199–200, Foot 1983, p. 254, Donagan 1984, pp. 276–281; and Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, pp. 108–135.

¹⁸ Such a tactic is deployed, for example, in Hare 1981.

¹⁹ This tactic is suggested in Foot 1983, although Foot does not use the distinction to deny the possibility of moral dilemmas.

or lexically order them. The goal of such activity should be, *inter alia*, to eliminate moral dilemmas.²⁰

Agnes might find it fascinating to explore the ramifications of the second strategy further if she found the first strategy especially compelling. But she need not. The first strategy has two components, an appeal to an analogy between the enterprises of scientific theorizing and ethical theorizing, and an assimilation of moral dilemma to logical inconsistency. A closer examination of the first component can result in one's denying the second.

The goal of predictive success in scientific theory is important but not paramount. For some sciences, such as paleontology and cosmology, prediction plays little or no direct role. Two rival scientific hypotheses might make the same predictions, yet one of them might do a better job of explaining the phenomena than the other. Explanation and understanding lie at the heart of science in such a way that an adequate scientific theory makes it clear why its predictions are successful and not just lucky guesses. If Agnes takes the analogy between scientific theory and ethical theory seriously, she should expect an adequate ethical theory not only to tell her what to do but also, more fundamentally, to give an account of why she should do it. The latter function of the theory will be bound up with the theory's criteria of moral judgment and appraisal; that is, the criteria in terms of which the theory judges things, persons, and situations to be good or bad and actions to be right or wrong, obligatory, forbidden, or permissible. Just as rationally acceptable scientific prediction must be embedded in an adequate explanatory framework, so rationally acceptable moral guidance must depend on an adequate theory of moral appraisal. Agnes may be a theological voluntarist, but remember that on her brand of voluntarism, God's will is informed by his love and wisdom.

Still, one might ask, how can a reasonable theory of moral appraisal ever issue in dilemmatic moral guidance? How can an adequate ethical theory ever tell us that one and the same action is right and wrong or obligatory and forbidden, all things considered? The problem seems to be compounded for theistic ethical theory. It seems impossible that an omniscient God would inadvertently promulgate an ethical theory whose criteria of appraisal yield inconsistent guidance on occasion.

If Agnes has her wits about her, she will be able to see that appraisal and guidance can come apart, even in an ethical theory that is reasonable, adequate, and complete. In this respect the analogy between scientific theory and ethical theory fails. A scientific theory that predicts incompatible phenomena in some possible situation is a theory whose explanatory devices are somehow defective. In contrast, if an ethical theory's criteria of appraisal tell us that in a

²⁰ A version of this tactic is deployed in Donagan 1977 and Donagan 1984.

given situation, x ought to do ϕ and x ought not to do ϕ , then that *might* be a sign that the theory is defective, but it *need* not be. The judgment in question might be the best, most complete assessment of the situation: anything less may be one-sided, tendentious, overly simplistic, or insensitive to the complexities of the situation. In such a case, the theory's ability to offer guidance breaks down, if guidance is supposed always to require the specification of a permissible course of action. Even though a reasonable, adequate, and complete ethical theory will include a general system of moral appraisal, it will lack a comprehensive procedure for moral guidance, understood as the identification of permissible alternatives, if there are genuine strong moral dilemmas.

The kind of breakdown between appraisal and guidance induced by moral dilemmas need not be a symptom of logical inconsistency. The argument for the assimilation of moral dilemma to logical inconsistency rests on two less-than-obvious principles, the agglomeration principle and the principle that "ought" implies "can," or what I shall call the ability principle.²¹ I propose to leave the agglomeration principle undiscussed and focus instead on the ability principle. Let us consider first a special but easily overlooked case of a strong moral n -lemma, the case in which $n = 1$. In this case there is only one action, ϕ , open to x , and ϕ is such that if x does ϕ , then x does something that x ought not to do. Call such a case a moral *monolemma*. It is obvious that consideration of the agglomeration principle is out of play here. So the issue of logical inconsistency in the case of monolemmas boils down to this question: if an ethical theory countenances the existence of monolemmas, does that show that the theory is inconsistent or that the ability principle is not universally true?

Let us have an example before us. Suppose that Jones kills a pedestrian while voluntarily driving drunkenly. The intuitive moral response is to say that Jones ought to have avoided hitting the pedestrian. But in his condition Jones was not able to. We may say of this case either that the intuitive moral response is mistaken or that the case constitutes a refutation of the ability principle. In an attempt to exercise the first option, there are those who would say that what Jones ought not to have done was drive while drunk. We need not gainsay that judgment, but it does not negate the fact that Jones also ought to have avoided hitting the pedestrian. Perhaps there are those who would say that in some sense of "can," Jones, even in his inebriated condition, could have avoided hitting the pedestrian. No doubt there is some such sense of "can," but to appeal to such a sense risks saving the ability principle at the cost of rendering it

²¹ For doubts about the agglomeration principle, see (in Gowans 1987a) Williams 1973, pp. 132–134, van Fraassen 1973, pp. 148–150, Marcus 1980, p. 200, Foot 1983, p. 254; and Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, pp. 127–135. For doubts about the ability principle, see Marcus 1980, in Gowans 1987a, pp. 199–200; and Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, pp. 110–126.

trivial. In the sense of “can” with which we have been operating, involving both ability and opportunity, avoiding the pedestrian is not something Jones can do. At the time of the accident, he either lacked the ability or his condition prevented him from exercising it.

This example suggests that there are other sorts of monolemma, or cases in which the ability principle is not true. A segment of a person's behavior may be so habituated that even though she knows that she should not behave that way, she cannot avoid it. If occurrent mental judgments count as actions, then they comprise a rich source of counterexamples to the ability principle. Smith ought not to form biased opinions about the members of other racial groups, but he cannot directly prevent himself from doing so. (The best Smith may be able to do is not to act on those opinions and to take whatever steps he can indirectly to reform them.) It is mildly ironic that the etiological assumption of the *secundum quid* thesis is more plausible as an account of many cases of moral monolemma than it is of dilemma. But perhaps not all: Smith's biased opinions might have their origin in Smith's unlucky upbringing in a racist social environment.

If Agnes is a Christian theist, she will have additional reasons to regard the ability principle with suspicion, reasons that depend on beliefs about the function of God's grace. The Pelagians took Matthew 5:48 as a proof text for the heretical claim that grace was not necessary for salvation: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” God would not have commanded us to become perfect if it were not possible for us to do so on our own. Therefore, the Pelagians concluded, we are capable of leading lives free of sin by means of our own natural abilities, without the assistance of divine grace. The argument obviously depends on the ability principle. Confronted with the argument, some orthodox Christian theists curtail the principle in a way that makes it compatible with the passage from Matthew. Aquinas, for example, says that although individual acts of sinning can be avoided, no one without grace can persevere against all acts of sinning for any great length of time (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 109, a. 8). It is tempting to read into Aquinas's remarks an awareness of a fallacious quantifier shift: “Each individual act of sinning is such that the agent can avoid it” could be true while “The agent can avoid all acts of sinning” be false.²² Thus, even though it is plausible to interpret the injunction of Matthew 5:48 as requiring that you avoid sin at all times, anti-Pelagian orthodoxy maintains that it is not within your natural power to avoid sin at all times.

²² Compare “Each individual day of creation is such that I can live through it” with “I can live through all the days of creation.” Note also that on the hypothesis that there are strong moral dilemmas, although the agent might be able to avoid each individual act of sinning, there will nevertheless be situations in which she will not be able to avoid sinning.

A defender of the ability principle can legitimately claim that the only curtailment imposed on it by the above consideration is on its *collective* use, not its *distributive* use. According to the collective version of the principle, "You ought to avoid all sin" might not imply "You can avoid all sin." Even so, that would leave untouched the thesis that "Each individual sin is such that you ought to avoid it" implies "Each individual sin is such that you can avoid it." It takes further considerations to dislodge the distributive version of the ability principle. The doctrine of God's grace provides one source of such considerations. There is, for example, the phenomenon of God's hardening the hearts of some, construed as his justly withdrawing his aid from someone who has turned away from him.²³ Many of the resultant individual sins committed by such a person are forbidden yet unavoidable.

Agnes thus has ample reason to doubt the truth of the ability principle in many cases of moral monolemmas. Or, to put it another way, Agnes's ethical theory displays no void of inconsistency in its escutcheon by acknowledging moral monolemmas; it simply provides grounds for denying the ability principle. And once released from the grip of the ability principle, what reason could Agnes have for not expecting to find moral *n*-lemmas for $n > 1$?

Do not think that this question is merely rhetorical. Even if an ethical theory can be logically consistent while allowing moral dilemmas, Agnes's theistic ethical theory might not pass muster. There might be particular theistic reasons for thinking that God would not confront his creatures with *simpliciter* dilemmatic situations. J. L. A. Garcia has recently put forward two arguments to this effect. The arguments express what I think worries many theists about the possibility of moral quandary. In responding to them, we will be able to extract some more general lessons about theistic ethical theory.

Garcia's first argument appeals to God's (essential) rationality and omniscience:

Now a rational agent never wills each of two things she knows to be mutually exclusive. However, if there are situations in which one acts wrongly no matter how one acts and therefore situations in which one acts against God's will no matter how one acts, then it would seem God must will things which are, and which He therefore knows to be, mutually exclusive. Since God cannot act in such an irrational way, it appears we need to give up either some traditional Christian beliefs about God's will and knowledge or the thesis that there are situations in which one cannot but act wrongly. (Garcia 1990, p. 192)

²³ See Kretzmann 1988 and Stump 1988.

Garcia's second argument appeals to God's moral perfection:

[I]t is a commonplace of both secular and Christian morality that it is immoral to will another to do evil. However, if God wills one to do something which she cannot do without doing evil, then God, it would seem, wills her to do evil. (Garcia 1990, p. 192)

What credence should Agnes give the premise that "a rational agent never wills each of two things she knows to be mutually exclusive"? Agnes believes that God's will promulgates the principles that killing is wrong and that vows must be kept. The principles are not mutually exclusive, yet in their application to Jephthah's case, they yield dilemma. Is it then that God, in foreseeing Jephthah's plight, should not have promulgated one or the other of the two principles? If God acts according to the policy that if a set of principles ever yields an *n*-lemma, then at least one member of the set must not be promulgated, then God will promulgate a very short list of principles, perhaps one at most.²⁴ It may be that Garcia's premise is better construed as licensing any number of applications to particular cases; for example, the denial that God wills both that Jephthah keep his vow and that Jephthah not sacrifice his daughter. If in this context "wills" is tantamount to "effectively chooses," then the application of the premise is true but irrelevant to the campaign against moral dilemmas. Even omnipotent God cannot effectively choose both that Jephthah sacrifice and not sacrifice his daughter, but that fact does not constitute a tribute to God's *rationality*. Perhaps then "wills" in the context should be interpreted to refer to an imperative expression of God's will, so that the application of the premise to Jephthah's plight results in the claim that God, qua rational, does not command or require of Jephthah both that he keep his vow and not sacrifice his daughter. This thesis is not obviously true.

Suppose that Lloyd has been taught by his parents that he ought to honor them by keeping the promises he freely makes to them and that he ought to remember the Sabbath by not laboring on that day. Suppose further that out of gratitude for what they have done for him, Lloyd spontaneously promises to cut the hay on their farm on the next dry day. Suppose that the next dry day turns out to be a Sabbath. Suppose, finally, that Lloyd turns to his parents for help. We can imagine several different ways in which they might respond. I want to have us focus on one possible and natural response *that only makes sense on the hypothesis that Lloyd's situation is a genuine dilemma*.

²⁴ It is possible for a single principle to yield dilemma. See Marcus 1980, in Gowans 1987a, p. 192.

Lloyd's parents release him from his promise, suggesting that he defer cutting the hay. Lloyd's contrition in approaching his parents is evidence that he believes, as do his parents, that his failure to keep the promise would be wrong, just as his failure to remember the Sabbath would be wrong. The parents' action is not to *advise* Lloyd, as if they thought that one alternative were preferable or somehow made permissible by the context. Instead, their action *extricates* Lloyd from his predicament by graciously waiving or deferring a requirement legitimately owed them in order that he might be able to fulfill his other, conflicting requirement. Their action achieves something *for* Lloyd that cannot be achieved *by* Lloyd. From the parents' and Lloyd's point of view, Lloyd is required to keep his promise and required to remember the Sabbath. To waive a requirement is not to make it not to have been. The parents, in waiving or deferring Lloyd's requirement to keep his promise, are willing to absorb a wrong done to them and forgive Lloyd in advance. They might also hope that their action will have the educative effect of encouraging Lloyd to be more circumspect about avoiding such predicaments in the future. Finally, if Lloyd's parents are sensitive and sensible, they will not dwell on the fact that they are waiving a requirement: nothing undermines gracious behavior so much as parading it. The parents' action can only be described in this way on the assumption that Lloyd is in a real, not just an apparent, dilemma. A diehard, committed to the impossibility of dilemmas, will have to say of this case that Lloyd and his parents are deluded, playing out a touching, benighted charade. It is obvious that we need not acquiesce in that judgment.

Agnes is thus entitled to believe that a being can be rationally required to do mutually exclusive things. But now one may be inclined to ask why God was not as gracious with Jephthah and his daughter as Lloyd's parents are with Lloyd. God could have intervened at Jephthah's homecoming and canceled the debt owed him. Or he could have arranged that the only thing that came out of Jephthah's doors was a superannuated chicken. How could a morally perfect God allow such a tragic denouement? Even if Agnes need not subscribe to the first of Garcia's arguments, it might seem as if the second is devastating when applied to Jephthah's plight. God apparently wills that Jephthah keep his vow, which Jephthah cannot do without doing evil, namely, killing his daughter.²⁵ Therefore, if Garcia is right, God wills Jephthah to do evil.

Garcia's argument must pass successfully through two stages. Suppose that,

- (1) x wills that y do ϕ and [x knows that] y cannot do ϕ without doing evil.

²⁵ I for one would find it hard to deny that God wills that Jephthah kill his daughter; see Mann 1988. And I would be suspicious of any attempt to maintain that in these circumstances, what Jephthah does is not evil.

The addition of the bracketed knowledge claim in (1) gives Garcia a stronger premise and makes (1) more obviously applicable to omniscient God. The first stage of the argument is that (1) is supposed to entail,

(2) x wills that y do evil.

The second stage of the argument is that (2) is supposed to entail,

(3) x 's willing that y do evil is immoral.

One might think that (2) follows from (1) by means of a principle to the effect that to will the end is to will the means. But if we assume that to will that someone do evil is to will that the person do some evil action, then there are at least two readings that can be given to (2):

(2') There is some action, ψ , such that ψ is evil and x wills that y do ψ .

(2*) x wills that there be some action, ψ , such that ψ is evil and y does ψ .

It is clear that (2*) does not follow from (1). Lloyd's parents will that he remember the Sabbath, knowing that he cannot do that without breaking his promise. It does not follow, as (2*) would have it, that they malevolently will that there be some action of his that is evil. If anything in the neighborhood follows from (1), it is more likely to be something like (2').²⁶ Lloyd's parents will that he break his promise, and Lloyd's breaking his promise is evil. On the (2') interpretation of (2), however, we cannot get to (3). There is nothing immoral about Lloyd's parents willing that he break his promise, because the promise was made to them and it is the sort of promise from which they may waive their claim. Garcia's second argument thus fails. Even if (1) entails (2'), (2') does not entail (3). And even if (2*) entails (3), (1) does not entail (2*). There is no plausible way to book passage successfully from (1) to (3).

We can now explicate a way in which dilemmas fit into Agnes's theism. The crucial concepts are offense, repentance, forgiveness, and mercy. Offense is distinct from harm. Although we cannot harm God, we can certainly do things that offend him. For very many—perhaps all—moral wrongdoings, offense is given primarily to God whether others are harmed or not. Offense can also be given to others. If Lloyd callously reneges on his promise to his parents, he may

²⁶ It is not clear to me that (2') follows from (1), partly because it is not clear to me what proposition (1) is supposed to express. Even without the bracketed knowledge claim, "y cannot do ϕ without doing evil" needs to be explicated. For the purposes of this chapter, I will assume, without prejudice, that (2') follows from (1).

offend (and harm) them. Offenders can repent the wrong they have done. They can even, as in Lloyd's case, show contrition about an impending, unavoidable wrong. Such behavior provides an occasion for the wronged party to forgive the offender. There are three observations to be made here. First, the wronged party might forgive the offender even if the offender has shown no signs of repentance or contrition. Second, there may be circumstances in which the wronged party ought not to forgive the offender. Third, "the wronged party" may include a plurality of agents occupying different positions in the moral network. Forgiveness by one in the absence of forgiveness by the others may not be sufficient to achieve total forgiveness. Had he reneged on his promise, Lloyd would have offended both his parents and God, in which case his parents' forgiveness might or might not have been sufficient to settle God's grievance with Lloyd. In the ordinary course of events, forgiveness is a manifestation of an agent's loving mercy.

If Agnes believes that God is perfectly rational and good, she can believe nevertheless that his creatures may confront genuine dilemmas that are not of their own making, just as she believes that they confront suffering and evil. If Agnes believes that God is just, she can believe that God sometimes requires, with justification, contrary performance from them. If Agnes believes that God is merciful, the one who sacrificed *his* only begotten son so that we might have eternal life, she can believe that God will forgive those who genuinely repent, absorbing the offenses committed primarily against him in his infinite and all-encompassing love. Agnes's reflections on the story of Jephthah may make clear to her another dimension of her religious commitment. Jephthah's faith is commended to us by the author of Hebrews (11:32). Yet Jephthah's faith is overshadowed by the faith of his daughter, who remains nameless to history. Faith is a virtue, but so too is hope.²⁷

References

- Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1987. *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Aquinas, Saint Thomas. 1980. *Opera Omnia*. Edited by Roberto Busa. 7 vols. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag / Günther Holzboog.
- Donagan, Alan. 1977. *The Theory of Morality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²⁷ An earlier version of this chapter benefitted from the comments of Alan Donagan, J. L. A. Garcia, Scott MacDonald, and Philip L. Quinn. The University of Vermont and the National Endowment for the Humanities provided research support. I wrote most of the original paper while enjoying the intellectual stimulation at the Center for the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Alfred J. Freddoso for the many discussions we had on these topics.

- Donagan, Alan. 1984. "Consistency in Rationalist Moral Systems." *Journal of Philosophy* 81: 291–309. Reprinted in Gowans 1987a.
- Foot, Philippa. 1983. "Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma." *Journal of Philosophy* 80: 379–398. Reprinted in Gowans 1987a.
- Garcia, J. L. A. 1990. "Love and Absolutes in Christian Ethics." In *Christian Philosophy*, edited by Thomas P. Flint. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Geach, Peter. 1969. *God and the Soul*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Geach, Peter. 1980. Review of *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, by Philip L. Quinn (1978). *Philosophical Quarterly* 30: 180–181.
- Gowans, Christopher, ed. 1987a. *Moral Dilemmas*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gowans, Christopher. 1987b. "Introduction: The Debate on Moral Dilemmas." In Gowans 1987a.
- Hare, R. M. 1981. "Moral Conflicts." In Gowans 1987a.
- Kretzmann, Norman. 1988. "God among the Causes of Moral Evil: Hardening of Hearts and Spiritual Blindness." *Philosophical Topics* 16, 2: 189–214.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1984. *After Virtue*. 2nd ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1988. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mann, William E. 1988. "God's Freedom, Human Freedom, and God's Responsibility for Sin." In *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, edited by Thomas V. Morris. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Reprinted as Chapter 10 of this volume.
- Mann, William E. 1989. "Modality, Morality, and God." *Noûs* 23: 83–99. Reprinted as Chapter 9 of this volume.
- Marcus, Ruth Barcan. 1980. "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency." *Journal of Philosophy* 77: 121–136. Reprinted in Gowans 1987a.
- McConnell, Terrance C. 1978. "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency in Ethics." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 8: 269–287. Reprinted in Gowans 1987a.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1978. *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1979. "Divine Command Morality: A Causal Theory." In *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Janine Marie Idziak. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1986. "Moral Obligation, Religious Demand, and Practical Conflict." In *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, edited by Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1989. "Tragic Dilemmas, Suffering Love, and Christian Life." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 17: 151–183.
- Santurri, Edmund N. 1987. *Perplexity in the Moral Life: Philosophical and Theological Considerations*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. 1988. *Moral Dilemmas*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Stump, Eleonore. 1988. "Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will." *Journal of Philosophy* 85: 395–420.
- Van Fraassen, Bas C. 1973. "Values and the Heart's Command." *Journal of Philosophy* 70: 5–19. Reprinted in Gowans 1987a.
- Von Wright, Georg Henrik. 1968. "An Essay in Deontic Logic and the General Theory of Action." *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 21: 1–110.
- Williams, Bernard. 1973. "Ethical Consistency." In *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Reprinted in Gowans 1987a.

The Guilty Mind

Consider two passages that are the focus of this chapter.

When Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, turns his attention to the commandment against adultery, he amplifies it by saying that “everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

It is a time-honored principle in the criminal law that *actus non facit reum nisi mens sit rea*, an act does not make [its agent] guilty unless the mind be guilty. Call this the mens rea principle.

Suppose one interprets “with lust” in Jesus’ pronouncement as signaling the presence of an intention to commit adultery. Then, even if the lustful agent were never to act on the intention (for lack of opportunity, say), he would not escape a charge of guilt; he would have a guilty mind. Suppose further that Jesus’ pronouncement generalizes that for any kind of wrongdoing, ϕ , to intend to ϕ is already to do something for which one is culpable. Intention can be sufficient for culpability.

According to the mens rea principle, a person is not legally liable for her action if she did not intend to do what she did. (Cases of criminal negligence and reckless behavior provide counterexamples to the principle. No harm will be done, however, if we set them aside.) The mens rea principle has its roots in common-sense morality. Your believing that I trod clumsily but accidentally on your sore foot would provoke one set of reactions; your believing that I did it intentionally, quite another. Intention can be necessary for culpability.

Together, then, the Sermon on the Mount and the mens rea principle make a strong case for the importance of intention to judgments of culpability. But importance comes in degrees, as do notions of intention. As a result there can be different versions of *intentionalism*, a family of views that lays stress on the significance of intention in assessments of culpability. In what follows I shall present a robust version of intentionalism championed by a philosopher, let us

call him Aurel, who takes both the mens rea principle and the Sermon on the Mount seriously. A few preliminary remarks are in order to describe the general contours of Aurel's position.

Sometimes to say that a person acted intentionally is to say nothing more than that she did not act accidentally.¹ Aurel's notion of acting intentionally is more robust than that. To act intentionally is to act as the result of a deliberative exercise that takes beliefs and desires as inputs and yields a decision as output. Thus Aurel's conception of acting intentionally supports the following conditional concerning intending to ϕ : If A intends to ϕ , then A will ϕ if the opportunity arises.² Aurel is willing to concede that phenomenologically the decision-making exercise can seem to the agent to take place instantaneously. What is important to him is a kind of logical, not temporal, priority; namely, that the analysis of acting intentionally requires specification of beliefs and desires. For this reason, if we suppose that to act willingly or voluntarily is simply to do what one wants to be doing, Aurel distinguishes acting willingly from acting intentionally. Many actions are performed both willingly and intentionally, but not all are. I surrender my wallet to the mugger intentionally but not willingly. The nicotine-depleted smoker might light up willingly but nonetheless "absentmindedly."

With this understanding of intention as resolving-to-do-should-opportunity-arise, Aurel understands the mens rea principle and Matthew 5:28 (generalized) in the following ways, respectively,

MRP If A is culpable for performing ϕ , then A performs ϕ intentionally in circumstances in which it is impermissible to perform ϕ .

SMP If A intends to perform ϕ in circumstances in which it would be impermissible for A to perform ϕ , then A's intending to perform ϕ makes A as culpable as A would be were A to perform ϕ .

Aurel takes **MRP** and **SMP** to be principles concerning the appraisal of an agent's performance, not a principle about the rightness or wrongness of actions performed. The two principles are silent about what makes it impermissible for A to perform ϕ . If it helps, you can imagine that acts are impermissible if they fail to maximize happiness or are not validated by the Categorical Imperative. Aurel is apt to favor the view that acts are impermissible if they contravene a divine command, but that is a topic for another paper.

¹ Cf. T. M. Scanlon, "Intention and Permissibility," *The Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 74 (2000): 306.

² Further refinement of the conditional would build in a requirement that A believe that the opportunity is not immensely unlikely. I cannot seriously intend to win the Powerball lottery.

In order to get a full sense of the robustness of Aurel's intentionalism, we need to see how he uses it to criticize moral and legal practices that deviate from adherence to **MRP** and **SMP**. In what follows I present three kinds of case that test Aurel's allegiance to **MRP**, namely, Lying, Strict Criminal Liability, and Intention and Foreseeability. I will then present two kinds of case to which **SMP** has application.

I. Lying

The first test for Aurel's intentionalism is provided by the phenomenon of lying. When asked to say what a lie is, most people will agree that a lie is a false statement that the speaker believes to be false. Both conditions seem necessary. In telling you the truth that St. Paul is the capital of Minnesota, I have not lied to you even if I believe that Minnesota's capital is Minneapolis. And if I sincerely tell you that São Paulo is the capital of Brazil, when in fact Brazil's capital is Brasilia, although I might misinform you, I have not lied. Further reflection will lead many people to think that the two conditions are not sufficient. That is, there are cases in which A tells B something that is false and that A believes to be false but in which A has not thereby lied to B. Examples: A tells B a joke: "So, space aliens abducted Dick Cheney last week . . ."; A recites the line "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" while auditioning for a production of *Hamlet*. What these cases suggest is a third condition, something to the effect that a lie has to be told in a context in which truth-telling is the norm (and clearly the telling of jokes and the reciting of scripts are not such contexts).

Aurel is happy enough to accept these three conditions, but, given his intentionalism, he does not regard them as jointly sufficient. Consider the following cases:

Devotion: Francesca protests Paolo's innocence to Paolo's brother and her husband, Gianciotto. In fact, Francesca has been sleeping with Paolo. Moreover, Francesca knows that Gianciotto knows about the couple's infidelity; thus that her protestation does not fool Gianciotto as to the facts. The context of the announcement is a context in which truth-telling is the norm. The point of Francesca's protestation is to give Paolo enough time to escape.

Not Guilty: Grimesby pleads Not Guilty at his arraignment before the judge, even though Grimesby knows that he committed the crime. Because his participation in the crime was recorded on videotape that has been aired repeatedly on the local television stations, Grimesby does not

imagine that the judge or anyone else in the court believes that he is not guilty. He simply takes his plea to be a step necessary to obtaining a trial.

By Aurel's lights neither Francesca nor Grimesby has lied. Why not? Because neither had an intention to deceive anyone. According to Aurel, a fourth condition necessary to pin down the notion of lying is that the speaker must intend to deceive at least some members of the audience by means of what the speaker has said.³ Now Aurel's addition will not be allowed to pass muster without an inspection. Some might try to handle **Devotion** and **Not Guilty** without the addition, either by claiming that a lie has been made, irrespective of the agent's intention, or by claiming that the context of utterance is not a context governed by a norm of truth-telling. The latter tactic might be deployed with regard to **Not Guilty**. "A judicial arraignment," a critic might allege, "is just not a setting in which one expects a defendant to speak the truth. Grimesby's plea is not a declaration having a truth value. It is more like a password that he must utter to proceed to the next stage of the legal process." Notice that Aurel *can* agree that arraignments are exceptions to the assumption of truth-telling. But he *need not* agree. Is the critic making an empirical observation about people's attitudes towards arraignments? Or is the critic's claim rather that there is something constitutive about arraignments that exempts them from the norm? And what will the critic say of the case of the defendant who pleads Guilty? These are questions for the critic to answer, not Aurel. For all that the critic has said, Aurel can and does maintain that *whether or not* arraignments presuppose truth-telling, Grimesby has not lied, because he lacked an intention to deceive.

The critic's tactic is less plausible in **Devotion**. There is a norm of truth-telling when the audience is one's spouse. So let us consider a critic who says that contrary to Aurel's claim, Francesca lied. This critic says: "I grant you that Francesca's primary aim was to buy time for Paolo, but her means of doing that consisted in telling a lie, directly about Paolo and indirectly about her own involvement with Paolo. The context presupposed truthfulness, and Francesca exploited that presupposition in her utterances." Aurel can acquiesce in much of what the critic says, except, of course, for the assertion that Francesca lied. To be sure, depending on how we embellish the story, it might be that Francesca's protestation is in service of a grander plot to assassinate Gianciotto. There is nothing amiss about inquiring skeptically into Francesca's motivation. But, Aurel will insist, it is one thing to impute a base motive to an action and another thing to classify an action as a lie. It is tempting to make the inference from "basely motivated linguistic performance" to "lie." We should resist the temptation.

³ For a recent endorsement of this condition, see Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 96.

Aurel supposes, then, that **Devotion** and **Not Guilty**, properly understood, count in favor of requiring an intent-to-deceive clause in the characterization of a lie. But might there not be other cases of verbal actions in which it is undeniable that the agent lied even though the agent had no intention to deceive? Thomas Carson has designed two such cases to show that the intent-to-deceive condition is not essential to lying. Let us call the first one **Craven Witness**:

Suppose that I witness a crime and clearly see that a particular individual committed the crime. Later, the same person is accused of the crime and, as a witness in court, I am asked whether or not I saw the defendant commit the crime. I make the false statement that I did not see the defendant commit the crime, for fear of being harmed or killed by him. It does not necessarily follow that I intend that my false statements deceive anyone. (I might hope that no one believes my testimony and that he is convicted in spite of it.) Deceiving the jury is not a means to preserving my life. Giving false testimony is necessary to save my life, but deceiving others is not; the deception is merely an unintended "side effect." I do not intend to deceive the jury in this case, but it seems clear that my false testimony would constitute a lie.⁴

The second one we can call **Cheating Student**:

Suppose that a college Dean is cowed whenever he fears that someone *might* threaten a lawsuit and has a firm, but unofficial, policy of never upholding a professor's charge that a student cheated on an exam unless the student confesses in writing to having cheated. The Dean is very cynical about this and believes that students are guilty *whenever* they are charged. A student is caught in the act of cheating on an exam by copying from a crib sheet. The professor fails the student for the course and the student appeals the professor's decision to the Dean who has the ultimate authority to assign the grade. The student is privy to information about the Dean's de facto policy and, when called before the Dean, he (the student) affirms that he didn't cheat on the exam. . . . The student says this on the record in an official proceeding and thereby warrants the truth of statements he knows to be false. He intends to avoid punishment by doing this. He may have no intention of deceiving the Dean that he didn't cheat.⁵

⁴ Thomas L. Carson, "The Definition of Lying," *Noûs* 40 (2006): 289.

⁵ Carson, "The Definition of Lying," 290.

Consider first **Craven Witness**. Carson claims that the lying witness does not intend to deceive *the jury*. That is not enough to show that intent to deceive is inessential to lying. Suppose that Riff and Bernardo are on their way to the local numbers parlor to lay down a few illegal bets. They are accosted by Officer Krupke, who wants to know what they are doing. Riff tells Krupke that he and Bernardo are going to church. Riff lies, intending to deceive Krupke, not Bernardo. It is no part of a plausible intent-to-deceive condition that one must intend to deceive *every* member of one's audience. From the way in which **Craven Witness** is described, it appears that there is at least one person who the witness intends to deceive about what he saw, namely, the defendant. Let us make it explicit, then, on Carson's behalf, that the witness knows that the defendant knows that the witness saw the defendant commit the crime. Aurel can still demur from the claim that the witness does not intend to deceive the jury, by invoking the distinction between acting intentionally and acting willingly. Aurel can claim that it is more accurate to say that the witness does not willingly deceive the jury but does so, nonetheless, intentionally.

Now on to **Cheating Student**. Carson claims about this case both that the student lies and that the student has no intention to deceive anyone. But notice the context in which the case is embedded. The student began a project of deception when he cheated on the exam, a project in service of the goal of getting a higher grade. He could have terminated the project by not appealing his professor's decision to the Dean. Aurel agrees that the student's warranted statement is a lie but insists that it *is* intended to deceive, by furthering the deceptive project that began with the cheating. We can call the principle to which Aurel appeals the Furtherance of Deception Principle:

FDP If a statement is made with the intention to further a project of deception, then the statement is made with the intention to deceive.

Note that "the intention to deceive" in the consequent of **FDP** need not be an intention regarding the content of the statement picked out in **FDP**'s antecedent. A *true* statement can satisfy **FDP**: deception need not confine itself to the false. It might be that A's long-range intention is to lie to B about some sordid episode in A's past. In order to gain B's trust and thus to set B up for accepting the falsehood, A reveals to B a whole series of *truths* about A's past. The true revelations that A thus makes qualify under **FDP** as statements made with the intention to deceive. Of course the intention to deceive in the case of the true revelations is not directed at the content of A's statements. Here it is instructive to compare Aurel with Bernard Williams. When Williams defines the notion of a lie, he says that it is "an assertion, the content of which the speaker believes

to be false, which is made with the intention to deceive the hearer with regard to that content.”⁶ Let us adopt Williams’s idiom but add the requirements that the speaker’s assertion must *be* false and be made in a context in which truth-telling is the norm. Finally, let us blend in the upshot of **FDP**. Aurel can then say that,

LIE A lie is an assertion made in a context in which truth-telling is the norm, whose content is false, which the speaker believes to be false, and which the speaker makes with the intention either to deceive at least one of the hearers with regard to that content or to further a project of deception undertaken by the speaker.

According to Carson, **Cheating Student** is a case of lying without intent to deceive. By Aurel’s lights, intentional deception is still implicated essentially. I suggest that, at a minimum, **LIE** is a serious contender for an adequate definition of lying. Given the prominent role that it assigns to intention, **LIE** allows for the creation of a special case of **MRP**:

MRP: Lie If A is culpable for lying, then A makes an assertion in a context in which truth-telling is the norm, whose content is false, which A believes to be false, and which A makes with the intention either to deceive at least one of the hearers with regard to that content or to further a project of deception undertaken by A, in circumstances in which it is impermissible for A to make the assertion.

Finally, we should note that **LIE** is an attempt to depict what a lie *is*. It is aimed at determining whether a person in a particular situation has lied. **LIE** is silent on the normative question raised by the last clause of **MRP: Lie**; namely, under what circumstances lying is impermissible. It is open to Aurel, for example, to take the hard line that there are no circumstances in which lying is permissible. But for now let us leave him content to argue for the correctness of **LIE** and **MRP: Lie**.

II. Strict Criminal Liability

Imagine the following scenario: Perry the lawyer has been approached by Cheatley, who wants Perry to defend him against a charge of murder. “Who is the victim?” Perry asks.

⁶ Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 96.

“Somebody named Vicky. I forget her last name; I never met her.”

“Then how did you kill—let me rephrase that—how is it that Vicky met her demise?”

“It began when she opened a mailing I sent . . .”

“Oh, dear, a letter bomb. Courts take a dim view of people who send letter bombs. We’d better go for an insanity defense.”

“No, that’s not what happened at all. Vicky was an agent for the Internal Revenue Service. When she opened my tax return, she realized quickly that it was fraudulent. That realization gave her a fatal heart attack. So I’ve been charged with her murder.”

The scenario is not as far-fetched as one might imagine. First, filing a fraudulent tax return is a felony. So Cheatley was engaged in felonious activity when he filed his return. Second, Cheatley’s filing the return brought about Vicky’s death: had he not filed the return, she would not have had her heart attack.⁷ Were Perry to take the case, he would argue that there is a huge gap between intending to defraud the government and intending to kill an IRS agent, claiming truthfully that Cheatley did harbor the first intention but not the second, and further, that had Cheatley known that his fraud would result in someone’s death, he would have abandoned his intention to defraud.

Depending on the venue in which the case is to be tried, Perry will find his argument facing greater or less resistance. Many states in the United States have *felony-murder laws*, laws which maintain that if someone is killed in the course of an attempt to commit a felony or to flee from a felony, all accomplices to the felony can be charged with murder. Felony-murder laws are the most dramatic members of a class of *strict criminal liability laws*, items of legislation that criminalize certain kinds of behavior in certain circumstances irrespective of the agent’s intentions. In both wording and precedent, different states apply the notion of a felony murder differently. But would any state sustain a conviction of Cheatley on charges of first-degree homicide?

Probably not. But there are actual cases that come surprisingly—some would say disturbingly—close to Cheatley’s. In *People v. Hickman*⁸ the Illinois Supreme Court upheld a lower court’s finding that the defendant was guilty of

⁷ I do not believe that the truth of the counterfactual conditional is sufficient to impute causal agency. Holding all other factors constant, Vicky might have had her heart attack whether or not Cheatley filed his fraudulent return.

⁸ 59 Ill. 2d 89 (1974). Another salient case is *People v. Fuller*, 89 Cal. App. 3d 618 (1978).

murder as a result of an unsuccessful burglary attempt at a liquor warehouse. The police had the warehouse under surveillance at night. As Hickman and two accomplices exited the warehouse, the police closed in. The three burglars fled. In the ensuing confusion one police officer mistook an armed police detective for one of the burglars. The officer shot the detective, killing him. There was no evidence that Hickman was armed before, during, or after the burglary. It does not take excessive charity to suppose that had Hickman believed that his burglary would lead to someone's death, he would have abandoned the burglary. The relevant part of Illinois's felony-murder statute states that "(a) A person who kills an individual without lawful justification commits murder if, in performing the acts which cause the death . . . (3) [h]e is attempting or committing a forcible felony other than voluntary manslaughter."⁹ One might be surprised to learn that Illinois regards burglary as a "forcible felony," especially when compared to burglary's more violent sibling, armed robbery. But surely even under Illinois's expansive conception of a forcible felony, fraudulent tax filing does not qualify. Nonetheless, *People v. Hickman* suggests that *People v. Cheatley* might be closer to legal reality than we had hitherto expected.

It is easy to anticipate some of Aurel's reaction to strict criminal liability laws in general and felony-murder laws in particular. Strict liability laws flout the mens rea principle by dispensing with the intentionality requirement. Felony-murder legislation abuses the well-entrenched notion of murder by promoting some palpably unintentional homicides to the rank of first-degree homicides. Aurel campaigns for a conception of murder that respects the mens rea principle:

MRP: Murder If A is culpable for murder, then A kills some person intentionally in circumstances in which it is impermissible for A to kill that person.

There is more to be said than this. For an intentionalist like Aurel, felony-murder laws cry out for justification. So let us imagine a defender of their propriety offering the following rationale:

"The defense I offer is a defense that is relative to the basic legal structure of a society. Different civil societies exhibit different patterns of response to behavior they regard as criminal. These patterns typically embody any number of historical accidents. Once embodied, the patterns take on a life of their own. Entrenchment can set in, in the name of evenhandedness and predictability; think of the importance attached to stare decisis. Working against universal

⁹ Ill. Rev. Stat. 1971, ch. 38, sec. 9-1(a)(3).

entrenchment are social pressures to dislodge legally ensconced practices now believed to be wrong. The result is that any human society's system of criminal law is apt to be a medley of vagariously assembled doctrines. Otto von Bismarck is supposed to have said: 'Laws are like sausages. It is better not to see them being made.' The point is that like sausages, human laws *are* made by human beings with all their foibles.

"Yet all these different patterns are recognizable attempts to provide security for citizens by punishing behavior that threatens their safety. As such, much of the criminal law is directed against behavior that we all regard as seriously morally wrong. But sometimes legislators find themselves having to achieve a balance among competing goals, each of which has warrant. For example, American jurisdictions place a high premium on the presumption of innocence in criminal proceedings. The presumption places the burden of proof on the prosecution, and in criminal cases, the standard of proof is high, 'beyond a reasonable doubt.' Adherence to the presumption of innocence results in an asymmetrical, adversarial trial dynamic, in which the prosecution's efforts are aimed at proving guilt while the defense's task is to induce reasonable doubt, chiefly by rebutting parts of the prosecution's evidence. Subscription to the presumption of innocence is optional: some other countries that have criminal judicial systems equally as just as the American system do not follow the principle or its attendant adversarial trial structure so assiduously. Although the presumption is optional, to say this is not to say that it is capricious, misguided, or wrong. At tension with the presumption of innocence is the goal of public safety: Americans understandably want to keep the number of violent crimes at a minimum. An ideal system of criminal justice would be one that infallibly identified the intentions and motives of every defendant brought before it. But for obvious reasons that is humanly impossible. Humans don't have the time, the resources, or the expertise that would be required to search the souls of people. Yet that is what American prosecutors would seem to have to do, following the presumption of innocence, namely, prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant had the requisite *mens rea*.

"What courts can do is assess behavior and other kinds of publicly accessible evidence. Some types of behavior are dangerous to others. In order to strike some sort of balance between public safety and the presumption of innocence, a legislature can adopt the policy that if a kind of behavior is felonious, can be shown to have been undertaken intentionally, and results in the death of another, then it is permissible to tax the agent of the behavior with a penalty that is the penalty he would have incurred had he unambiguously intended the other's death. The legislature need not be construed as adopting the patent

fiction that the agent intended the death.¹⁰ It can be viewed as declaring instead that the consequences of the agent's actions have exposed him to the same penalty he would have faced had he directly killed the other person.

"Felony-murder laws thus have two deterrent virtues. First, they discourage the commission of certain kinds of felonies by raising the stakes. They put would-be felons on notice that if things go awry with their felonious activity, they may find themselves facing the most serious penalties one can face. Second, they undercut the advantage the would-be felon might have thought he would have with the presumption of innocence. In cases of homicide to which felony-murder laws apply, prosecution no longer has the burden of proving the defendant's *mens rea*.

"I wish to emphasize that this defense of the legitimacy of felony-murder laws is provisional and contingent. Provisional, because it depends on empirical claims to the effect that felony-murder laws further the goal of public security by deterring people from certain kinds of crime. If those claims are false then the defense is punctured. Contingent, because there are different legal systems that get along fine without felony-murder laws. One cannot claim that they are necessarily woven into the fabric of an ideal legal structure. (The United Kingdom abolished them in 1957 and hasn't slid into chaos as a result.) Do they violate **MRP: Murder**? It is clear that they allow for the possibility that people can be held *legally* culpable for murder even when they are not morally culpable. But the boundaries of the province of legal culpability are drawn by a society's legislature: they are no more grounded in the nature of things than is the boundary between Minnesota and Ontario."

By now one might be excused for wondering how Aurel will react to this defense. The answer is simple. The defense *is* Aurel's. All that Aurel needs to do is to add two sentences to it: "In contrast, **MRP: Murder** is not a matter of convention. Its conditions on culpability for murder are not subject to human legislation and thus cannot vary from one jurisdiction to another." Note that, as was the case with **MRP: Lie**, **MRP: Murder** does not pronounce on what kinds of intentional homicides, if any, are permissible.

¹⁰ Here is a sampling of some dubious legal fictions.

(F1) Whoever intends ϕ also intends all the consequences of ϕ .

(F2) Whoever intends ϕ , knowing that ϕ is wrong (or illegal, take your pick), intends all the bad consequences of ϕ .

(F3) Whoever intends ϕ , knowing that ϕ is wrong (etc.), intends all the bad foreseeable consequences of ϕ .

(F1) and (F2) are enough to impale Hickman; maybe (F3), too—it all depends on how much is packed into the notion of foreseeability. (Some consequences are more foreseeable than others. Cheatley cannot have been expected to have foreseen that his fraudulent tax return would bring about a heart attack, but maybe Hickman should have realized that his burglary would run the risk of someone's dying.)

III. Intention and Foreseeability

Aurel's intentionalism would be flawed if its emphasis on what the agent intends were to result in an unsupportable exaggeration of the difference between intended consequences and merely foreseen consequences. Discussions of the role of intention in ethics frequently lead to discussions of the Doctrine of Double Effect, which in turn frequently lead to a consideration of the distinction between intended and merely foreseen consequences. The doctrine is supposed to apply to choice situations in which the consequences are unavoidably mixed, some being good, some bad. The doctrine has received insightful and provocative attention recently in its application to choices made in medical ethics, in the conduct of combatants in war, and in how one should conduct oneself in an area plagued by distressingly many wayward trolleys.¹¹ There are several ways of formulating the doctrine, not all of them obviously equivalent, but I shall assume that the following version is representative:

DDE If A's performing ϕ would unavoidably have both good consequences, **GC**, and bad consequences, **BC**, then it is permissible for A to perform ϕ if and only if (1) ϕ itself is not morally forbidden, (2) A does not intend to bring about **BC**, (3) **BC** is not causally necessary for **GC**, and (4) the badness of **BC** does not outweigh the goodness of **GC**.

Illustration: In the course of prosecuting a formally declared war against Bulgaria, the Commander in Chief of the armed forces of Ulceria has to decide whether to bomb Bulgaria's major munitions factory, thereby bringing the war to a speedier conclusion. The **DDE** tells the Commander that his action is permissible, even if the bombing results in loss of life of some noncombatant civilians, as long as the bombing itself is not a forbidden act, the Commander does not intend the death of the civilians, their death is not a causal means necessary for bringing about the speedier conclusion, and the good consequences of the speedier conclusion (say, in Bulgarian and Ulcerian lives spared) is not outweighed by the bad consequences of the Bulgarian civilian deaths.

Let us put pressure on clause (2) of **DDE**. Suppose that the Commander *knows* full well that bombing the munitions factory will kill several innocent noncombatants. (He knows this, we might suppose, because it is common knowledge that the Bulgians force kidnapped Ulcerian citizens to work in the

¹¹ See Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," *Oxford Review* 5(1967): 5–15; Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Trolley Problem," *Yale Law Journal* 94 (1985): 1395–1415; F. M. Kamm, *Morality, Mortality: Volume II: Rights, Duties, and Status* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Scanlon, "Intention and Permissibility."

factory.) Is it not facetious in this circumstance to maintain that although he foresees that they will be killed if he bombs the factory, he does not intend their death? How, in this circumstance, could foreseeing their death not just be intending their death, accompanied, perhaps, by some self-deception? And if it is not the same thing, how could the difference be significant enough so that intending their death would make the bombing impermissible whereas merely foreseeing their death would not?¹² Put the question in the idiom of Aurel's robust conception of intention: how can the decision to bomb, based in part on the true, justified belief that the noncombatants will be killed, not be a decision to kill the noncombatants?

It may be that the pressure on clause (2) is generated by the thought that known consequences are intended consequences:

KCIC If A intends to perform ϕ and knows that ψ is a consequence of A's performing ϕ , then A also intends ψ .

If true, **KCIC** would deal a serious blow to **DDE** by collapsing the distinction between foreseeing a consequence and intending it. But **KCIC** does not appear to be true. Suppose that A can save the life of either B or C but not both. Suppose further that A knows all the facts pertinent to her predicament. A lets a randomizing device, for example, a toss of a coin, determine whom she will save: heads, it is B; tails, C. Suppose the coin lands heads up. A now intends to save B, knowing that it follows that C must die. A does not intend that C die, even though she surely foresees that C's death is a consequence of her intentionally saving B.

I do not claim to have vindicated clause (2), much less **DDE**, for there may be other considerations independent of **KCIC** that allow pressure to continue to be applied to (2), and there are other quarrels one might have with the other clauses. But I do want to point out that an intentionalist of Aurel's stripe need not swear fealty to **DDE**, at least not in the way in which it is typically understood. Keeping with the spirit of **MRP**, Aurel can put forward something that looks like the Doctrine of Double Effect, but which nonetheless differs from it in significant ways:

MRP: Double Effect If A's performing ϕ unavoidably had both good consequences, **GC**, and bad consequences, **BC**, then A is culpable for performing ϕ if and only if *either* (1) ϕ itself was morally forbidden, *or* (2) A intended to bring about **BC**, *or* (3) **BC** was causally necessary for **GC**, *or* (4) the badness of **BC** outweighs the goodness of **GC**.

¹² Scanlon reports that a similar case was suggested to him by Judith Jarvis Thomson; see "Intention and Permissibility," 304–305.

Clause (2) shows that **MRP: Double Effect** does not dissolve the problem of distinguishing between what is intended and what is merely foreseen. But **MRP: Double Effect** is not simply a De Morgan transformation of **DDE**, specifying a logically equivalent principle in terms of forbiddenness instead of permissibility. The notion highlighted by **MRP: Double Effect** is culpability, not forbiddenness. Recall that the original **MRP** was put forward as a principle of agent performance appraisal, not as a principle about what is forbidden, obligatory, or permissible. The latter sort of principle is insensitive to the time at which it is applied to a particular case. **DDE**, for example, can be invoked prospectively, as a guide to action, or retrospectively, as a vehicle of moral criticism of the action committed. **MRP: Double Effect**, in contrast, has only a retrospective function—hence its formulation is in the past tense—namely, the assessment of the agent’s performance after the fact. An omniscient judge could, one presumes, determine whether A merely foresaw or intended that *BC* would come about, but short of omniscience, **MRP: Double Effect** is no better off than **DDE** concerning the foreseen-intended distinction. Moreover, the fact that **MRP: Double Effect** is exclusively retrospective and exclusively agent-judgmental may seem to rob it of much of its interest.

In a while Aurel will have a chance to respond to this attempt at dismissal. For now, however, let us turn to cases relevant to principle **SMP**. So far we have looked at cases that attempt to belittle the importance of intention as a necessary condition for imputations of culpability. The next two cases, Failed Attempts, and Intentions and Motives, cast doubt on the sufficiency of a presence of intention for ascriptions of culpability, thus challenging principle **SMP**.

IV. Failed Attempts

Here are two alternative hypothetical cases, one a “success,” the other a “failure.”

Premeditation: Alpha has coolly planned in advance to kill Beta, believing with good reason that Beta would soon blow the whistle on Alpha’s embezzling activities. Alpha raises his rifle, takes careful aim, and dispatches Beta with one shot.

Mosquito: Same scenario, two different actors. As Gamma peers down the barrel of his rifle aimed at Delta and begins to squeeze the trigger, a mosquito lands on his nose, causing his shot to go astray.

In **Premeditation** Alpha is guilty of first-degree homicide, something for which Alpha would presently stand to face the death penalty in thirty-eight

out of fifty states in the United States. In **Mosquito** Gamma is guilty of attempted murder, a felony, to be sure, but one that exposes Gamma to a much less severe penalty. Why the disparity? Alpha and Gamma have exactly the same evil intentions and motives. Gamma did everything he could to further his quest, just as Alpha did. Why should an adventitious mosquito make such a big legal difference?

Skeptics about the importance of intentions will say that the disparity indicates that we care more about results. How much more? As a statistical exercise, one might try to compute the average sentence meted out to defendants found guilty of first-degree homicide (arbitrarily assigning sixty years, say, to life sentences and to the death penalty), along with the average sentence imposed on defendants found guilty only of attempted homicide. The first average divided by the second would then give us the *failed attempt discount index*, or FADI, which could serve as a measure of the extent to which a particular jurisdiction discounts failed attempts compared to successful attempts. Thus if the jurisdiction hands out, on average, fifty-year sentences for first-degree homicides and five-year sentences for attempted homicides, its FADI is ten. One could then compare the FADIs among different jurisdictions to see whether interesting patterns emerge and to gauge the strength of the skeptics' case for demoting intentions.

As sociologically interesting as the construction of FADIs might be, they would merely quantify the practice; they would not justify it. The normative question remains: why *should* we follow a schedule of legal punishment in which Gamma's deed is treated more lightly than Alpha's? One might naturally seek to give a justification for the disparity by appealing to consequences. But while it is true that Alpha's act had worse consequences than Gamma's, it is hard to find a plausible systematic rationale for punishing Gamma less severely among the familiar consequentialistic dimensions of general deterrence, particular deterrence, incapacitation (or social quarantine), rehabilitation, and education.¹³ Perhaps in recognition of the lack of justification, Section 5.05 of the American Law Institute's Model Penal Code recommends that,

Except as otherwise provided in this Section, attempt, solicitation and conspiracy are crimes of the same grade and degree as the most serious offense which is attempted or solicited or is an object of the

¹³ For criticism of these sorts of attempts at justification, see David Lewis, "The Punishment That Leaves Something to Chance," in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 227–243.

conspiracy. An attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit a [capital crime or a] felony of the first degree is a felony of the second degree.¹⁴

It appears that the recommendation is to treat attempted burglary as if it were burglary, attempted arson as if it were arson, and so on, with the exception of a capital crime or a felony of the first degree, which would surely encompass premeditated, intentional homicide. In this case, the failed attempt would be demoted to second-degree homicide, which would carry with it a lesser penalty.

By Aurel's lights the Model Penal Code has almost got it right. If the various consequentialistic justifications for downgrading failed attempts are themselves unpersuasive, then there appears to be no provisional or contingent argument, akin to the rationale Aurel offered for felony-murder laws, that justifies treating failed attempts less severely than successful attempts. In short, the FADI for any jurisdiction should be one, even for failed attempts at homicide. We can imagine Aurel saying, with rhetorical zeal, that Gamma is as guilty of murder as Alpha is, thereby giving a forceful rendition of the phrase "guilty for all intents and purposes." The fact that Delta did not die because of Gamma's effort is immaterial to the assessment of Gamma's culpability. Aurel subscribes to a close relative of **SMP**:

SMP: Failed Evil Attempts If A attempts but fails to perform ϕ in circumstances in which it is impermissible for A to perform ϕ , then A's attempting to perform ϕ makes A as culpable as A would have been had A succeeded in performing ϕ .¹⁵

It may have occurred to you by now that failure comes in at least two flavors. One can fail in the attempt to do something evil, but one can also fail in the attempt to do something good. Suppose that Alberta and Alberto individually intend to donate substantial amounts of money to a charity. For that purpose it happens that both of them entrust their money in accounts managed by Bezzle, the banker. Bezzle decides to drain one of the accounts and abscond with the funds. Bezzle flips a coin to determine which account to drain. It happens to be Alberto's. As a consequence, Alberta's money goes to the charity while Alberto's money does not. If Alberta is praiseworthy, then Alberto should be equally as praiseworthy. But

¹⁴ American Law Institute, Model Penal Code (1962), as reprinted in Wayne R. LaFare, *Modern Criminal Law. Cases, Comments and Questions* (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1978), 741 (brackets in original).

¹⁵ Here and below let us understand "A attempts to ϕ " to rule out "halfhearted" attempts.

Alberta's existence in this case is, at bottom, irrelevant. It is Alberto who should be equally as praiseworthy whether or not he succeeds. The principle at work here is,

SMP: Failed Good Attempts If A attempts but fails to perform ϕ in circumstances in which it is permissible for A to perform ϕ , then A's attempting to perform ϕ makes A as praiseworthy as A would have been had A succeeded in performing ϕ .

V. Intentions and Motives: The Case of Self-Defense

Intentions are one thing, motives another. **SMP** ignores the importance of motives to the assessment of character (and thus may do an injustice to the interpretation of Matt. 5:28). We can examine the difference between intentions and motives by looking at the legal plea of self-defense. Criminal law relies on a set of purely external, formalistic criteria by which it gauges putative cases eligible for a plea of self-defense. Chief among these criteria are the following:

Imminence: The harm threatened by the attacker must be temporally immediate and unavoidable. B's threat to attack A a week from next Tuesday does not justify A in attacking B today (unless, perhaps, A is already unjustly in B's clutches). In the eyes of the law, a preemptive strike is not self-defense.

Proportionality: The harm inflicted by the intended victim must be just sufficient to thwart the attacker and must not exceed in any case the harm the attacker would have inflicted. If B's proposed act of aggression is simply to mush a custard pie in A's face, A cannot plead self-defense for gunning down B.

Reasonable Person Standard: The intended victim is expected to have assessed the situation and responded as a reasonable person would in the victim's circumstances. A's prospects for a successful plea of self-defense evaporate if it turns out that A believed B to be a space alien. (In this case, perhaps an insanity plea would be more successful.)

Consider now two hypothetical cases. In both of them the agent, fully aware of the eligibility criteria for a successful plea of self-defense, contrives to be the intended victim of an attack, using the attack as the occasion for killing the attacker.

Greed: Avaritia stands to inherit Luger Shortfuse's considerable fortune. But Luger is young and fit, with prospects of living a long life. Obsessed with the prospects of wealth and knowing of Luger's penchant for violence, Avaritia intentionally provokes him into attacking her with a poker. Avaritia puts to use Luger's loaded pistol, which she had planted nearby, thereby quickly becoming a wealthy heiress.

Tenderheartedness: Mauser Shortfuse, Luger's father, is suffering horribly from a terminal disease for which palliation is ineffective. Mauser wants to be put out of his misery but does not want his death to be counted as a suicide. Nor does he want his kin to be put at risk of a charge of murder, were they to exercise conventional modes of euthanasia. His daughter, Mercy, who knows all this and is moved by nothing other than compassion for her father, ruefully but determinedly exploits Mauser's one family foible by goading Mauser into attacking her so that she can kill Mauser quickly.

One can refine these cases so that Avaritia and Mercy both pass the tests for a successful plea of self-defense. And one can easily imagine someone who reasons in this fashion: "I would not care to live next door to the Shortfuse family. Even so, I would harbor less cold feelings for Mercy than for Avaritia. My differential response does not appear to be based on a difference in their intentions, for they both act from the same sort of intention—to kill a family member while making it look like self-defense. Nor is it based on the facts that Luger had no desire to die while Mauser did and that Avaritia deprived Luger of a longer, happier future than the future denied to Mauser by Mercy. Perhaps not all intentional killings are forbidden—let's set aside for another day a discussion about killing in warfare and legally sanctioned executions—but these two killings are forbidden. Nor can I detect more evil remote intentions in Avaritia. Her remote intention is to inherit, to which her intention to kill is a means, while Mercy's remote intention is to alleviate suffering. There is nothing wrong with an intention to inherit per se. So I'm left to conclude that what explains my antipathy towards Avaritia is the presence of greed in her, which is not present in Mercy. Greed is not an intention; back in the old days it was numbered among the seven deadly sins, an acquired vice that disposes its possessor to seek after more material goods than is necessary or fitting. So when it comes to agent performance appraisal, **SMP** can't be the whole story."

Aurel can acknowledge that whether it is acquired voluntarily or not, greed is the sort of character trait that ought to be resisted or stifled, precisely because it disposes its possessor to form evil intentions. But whatever culpability one has for the possession of a vice, it pales in comparison to the culpability one has for intentionally exercising it. A vice is a bit like Luger's loaded and unattended pistol—merely dangerous in itself but calamitous when used to

evil purposes. The best way, perhaps the only way, to resist a vice like greed is the same way one tries to break any bad habit—by avoiding situations that encourage the exercise of the vice and by resolving not to acquiesce in the vice when the situations are unavoidable. One may not succeed, but there seems to be no other way of even trying. The principle that applies here, by Aurel's lights, is this:

SMP: Vice If A attempts but fails to avoid performing ϕ in circumstances in which it is impermissible for A to perform ϕ , because A's vice-driven desire to perform ϕ overpowers his attempt to avoid performing ϕ , then A is less culpable than A would have been had A not (even) attempted to avoid performing ϕ .

Aurel also has a bone to pick with the formalistic criteria that help to define a successful plea of self-defense. That they can be manipulated, as in **Greed** and **Tenderheartedness**, is a symptom that they set the standard too low. More specifically, they are insensitive to the role that the agent's intention plays in these cases. Even more specifically, they function as surrogates to intention: instead of attempting to assay what the agent intended, courts can simply apply the criteria, thus allowing Avaritia and Mercy to slip through the cracks undetected.

Aurel's complaint here may strike one as unrealistically high-minded. We cannot read people's minds. Courts must make decisions by applying objective tests to publicly observable behavior, resisting the temptation to construct invidious and unverifiable hypotheses about the agent's intentions. Even if some sort of technology were developed that would allow authorities to eavesdrop on people's thoughts, we would regard that development with horror. Aurel himself is deeply suspicious about the wisdom, justice, and continued stability of any political authority. He is thus inclined to agree that there are many instances of wrongdoing for which government intervention would be worse than allowing the wrongdoing to go undetected, unapprehended, and. unpunished. What else can one hope for?

VI. Confessions

When it comes to appraising the hidden springs behind a person's publicly observable performance, one can hope for an authority who is omniscient, infallible and incorruptible, perfectly just and perfectly merciful, who will sort out and set right the injustices in the world. That is the direction in which Aurel

has been steering us.¹⁶ And Aurel is not a fictional character. I take myself to have been channeling, in contemporary idiom, the thought of Aurelius Augustinus, known more familiarly as St. Augustine, supplemented in some cases by insights from Peter Abelard, who, I am prepared to argue, knew Augustine's moral thought very well.¹⁷ A champion of human-made law would do well to attend to their arguments but need not fear usurpation of power: Aurel's judge presides over a different jurisdiction.

¹⁶ Note how **MRP: Double Effect**, even though exclusively retrospective, takes on importance from the point of view of a divine judge.

¹⁷ For my more historical excursions in these fields, see "Inner-Life Ethics," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 140–165; "To Catch a Heretic: Augustine on Lying," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003), 479–495; and "Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard*, ed. Jeffrey Brower and Kevin Guilfooy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 279–304.

Piety

Lending a Hand to Euthyphro

Philosophers claim to find in Plato's *Euthyphro* a powerful argument against any attempt to base moral judgments on religious foundations. Many philosophers would contend in particular that the argument central to the *Euthyphro* is a dilemma that challenges the project of assigning moral preeminence to the gods, or God.¹ For any morally praiseworthy action, either God loves the action because it is good or the action is good because God loves it. If God loves the action because it is good, then although that fact may disclose something about the purity of God's moral psychology, it discloses nothing about what makes the action good so that God may love it. If alternatively God's loving an action is what makes the action good, then it would seem hard to resist the conclusion that if God were to love adultery, blasphemy, and cannibalism (the ABCs of evil), then adultery, blasphemy, and cannibalism would be by that very fact morally *de rigueur*, a consequence that all but the religious diehards would find repugnant.

It is possible to be overly impressed by this dilemma.² However, my concern here is not to examine the pros and cons of theological objectivism and theological subjectivism nor to defend or attack some version of a divine command theory of moral rightness or wrongness. My contention instead is that in our eagerness

¹ See, for instance, Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), chap. 9 ("The Moral Law and the Law of God"); Baruch A. Brody, "Morality and Religion Reconsidered," in *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion: An Analytic Approach*, ed. Baruch A. Brody (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), pp. 592–603; Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 203–209; Norman Kretzmann, "Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality," in *Hamartia: The Concept of Error in the Western Tradition*, ed. Donald Stump et al. (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), pp. 27–50; and William E. Mann, "Modality, Morality, and God," *Noûs*, 23 (1989), pp. 83–99, reprinted as Chapter 9 of this volume. I do not mean to imply that any of these authors regards the dilemma as sound.

² See the essays cited in the previous note.

to join those issues, we philosophers have read back into the *Euthyphro* something that is not there; namely, any appreciation of that very set of general issues. The topic of the dialogue is something more *parochial* than that, in two senses of the term “parochial”: the topic is specific and specifically religious. Once we see the parochial nature of the *Euthyphro*, we can better appreciate the philosophical questions it does properly raise. We will also be in a position to reconsider Euthyphro’s hapless performance. I shall argue on his behalf that there are respectable ways of responding to the questions and arguments voiced by Socrates.

This chapter is a hybrid of two quite different projects. First, I try to give an accurate analysis of the argumentation that occurs in the *Euthyphro*, not only for the sake of historical fidelity but because the arguments ascribed to Socrates by Plato are shrewdly crafted and philosophically pertinent. That project occupies Sections I–III below. Second, in Sections IV and V, I sketch a response that someone of a Euthyphronian persuasion might give to Socrates’ arguments. That someone should not be thought to be Euthyphro himself. In furtherance of my second project I do not take myself to be confined to considerations that could have been entertained by Euthyphro, Socrates, Plato, or anyone else alive in fifth-century-BCE Athens. The response I sketch owes much to developments in Christian philosophical theology, developments of which it is obvious Plato could not have been aware. I offer no apologies for the hybridization. Hybrids can be sterile. I hope that the fruit of this experiment in hybridization turns out to be vigorous.

I. Some Preliminaries

The subject of the *Euthyphro* is Piety or the pious (*to hosion*): the dialogue begins in earnest when Socrates asks Euthyphro to tell him what kind of a thing Piety is, such that it, the selfsame thing, is common to all pious actions (5D).³ The ostensible religious backdrop for the dialogue involves the polytheistic pantheon of the Olympian deities, powerful and even good on balance, but nonetheless agreed upon by Euthyphro and Socrates to be a bunch of squabbling gods with human psychological foibles writ large.

When we contemporary philosophers wish to emphasize the enduring philosophical habitability of the *Euthyphro*, we retrofit it by making two adjustments to it. First, we treat the example of Piety as if it were virtually a cipher, replaceable with something as general, perhaps, as Goodness or Rightness.

³ Combinations of numbers and letters refer to the Stephanus pagination of the *Euthyphro*, as contained, say, in John Burnet’s 1900 Greek text, *Platonis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 1–23.

Second, finding very few believers in Zeus and his conspecifics nowadays, we replace the gods of Mt. Olympus with the—or *a*—monotheistic God. Modified in these ways, the dialogue can be understood in such a way that it raises fundamental questions about the attempts of monotheistic religions to provide theological foundations for morality. Contemporary philosophers can claim partial justification for the second modification by citing the drift of the *Euthyphro* itself. In order to set aside cases of disagreement among the gods, Plato has Socrates suggest to Euthyphro that they confine their attention—and the extension of the term Piety—to just those things that *all* the gods love (9C–D). Let us call this definition the (9D) definition:

(9D) Piety is what all the gods love.

In similar fashion, Impiety is to be confined to what all the gods hate. If all the gods are in harmony on matters pious and impious and if a monotheistic God is not racked with internal conflict, we can regard the second modification as bringing the dialogue more in line with monotheism.

We would do well, however, to keep a watchful eye on these two modifications. The shift to monotheism can be made to appear too simple, with the resultant conception of deity remaining virtually featureless, as much a cipher as Piety has sometimes been made to become. Plato had a conception of the gods of Mt. Olympus that was rich in content, whatever he may have thought about the veridicality of that content. Different monotheistic religions have overlapping but also rich and characteristically distinct conceptions of their deity. The plurality of conceptions might be expected to generate a plurality of responses to the *Euthyphro*. The hand that I lend to Euthyphro will not be a mere skeletal abstraction. It will be fleshed out with some elements of a familiar, Christian version of monotheism. The enduring *philosophical* relevance of the *Euthyphro* lies in the integrity of its arguments, not in its backdrop of Olympian deities.

As for the other modification, I shall concentrate my attention on the fact that the *Euthyphro* is about *Piety*, one but only one of a handful of virtues singled out for philosophical scrutiny by Plato. It is the same Piety that is a member of the famous quintet of virtues listed in the *Protagoras*, a virtue whose confreres are Wisdom, Courage, Self-Control, and Justice—or, had Plato been successful with the line of argument he tried out in the *Protagoras* and apparently abandoned thereafter, a virtue that would have been the same as the other four, as the other four would have been the same as each other.⁴

⁴ I intend the phrase “the same as” to be neutral between “necessarily equivalent in extension” and “identical.” For a defense of the former interpretation, see Gregory Vlastos, “The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, 25 (1971–1972), pp. 415–458. For the latter, see Terry Penner, “The Unity of Virtue,” *The Philosophical Review*, 82 (1973), 35–68.

II. The Onslaught

It is natural to think that the *Euthyphro*'s logical climax occurs at Stephanus page 11B, where Socrates wraps up the case against the (9D) definition. That argument and its culmination are a truly intricate and impressive piece of reasoning. It provides what grist there is in the dialogue for the dilemmatic mill mentioned earlier. Moreover, the argument is brought back on stage at 15B–C to criticize Euthyphro's last attempt at definition. Even so, the fact remains that the *Euthyphro* does run for another five pages after 11B, or a full one-third of the length of the dialogue. Those pages are given over to an attempt to complete a definition of Piety on the assumption that Piety is a kind of Justice. I wish to examine the content of those pages, suggesting that they are not entirely anticlimactic.⁵

But first, let us look at the argument at 9D–11B. Socrates has just offered, ostensibly on Euthyphro's behalf and certainly with Euthyphro's consent, the (9D) definition. Socrates now (10A) poses the notorious question, "Is Piety loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" Before Euthyphro gets a chance to answer the question, Socrates secures Euthyphro's assent to the following two theses, one positive, the other negative (where "φ" stands for any transitive verb of action):

- (1) A φed thing is φed because something (or someone) φs it.
- (2) It is not the case that something (or someone) φs a φed thing because it is φed.

Having established these two principles, Socrates gets Euthyphro to agree that:

- (3) The pious is loved by the gods because it is pious,

and that:

- (4) It is not the case that the pious is pious because it is loved by the gods.
(10D)

⁵ The *Euthyphro* has been blessed with some outstanding analysis and commentary. For analysis of the segment up to and including 11B, see S. Marc Cohen, "Socrates on the Definition of Piety: *Euthyphro* 10a–11b," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 9 (1971), pp. 1–13; and Richard Sharvy, "*Euthyphro* 9d–11b: Analysis and Definition in Plato and Others," *Noûs*, 6 (1972), pp. 119–137. For an interpretation of the post-11B part, see Mark L. McPherran, "Socratic Piety in the *Euthyphro*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (1985), pp. 283–309.

Socrates now springs the trap on Euthyphro's definition. That which is loved by the gods, or the god-beloved (*theophiles*), cannot be the same as the pious. For notice, first, the following instances of (1) and (2):

- (1i) A god-beloved thing is god-beloved because the gods love it.
- (2i) It is not the case that the gods love a god-beloved thing because it is god-beloved. (10E)

Now if (9D) were true and thus the god-beloved and the pious were the same, then by substitution (3) would yield:

- (3') The god-beloved is loved by the gods because it is god-beloved.

Moreover, substitution would convert (1i) into:

- (1i') The pious is pious because the gods love it.

But (3') contradicts (2i), and (1i') contradicts (4) (10E–11A). Hence Euthyphro cannot consistently cleave to the (9D) definition while assenting to all of principles (1)–(4).

But Socrates has more embarrassment to inflict on Euthyphro. In the last major unit of the *Euthyphro*, the two of them embark on a new campaign, in which Plato contrives to have Euthyphro march ultimately into the same ambush he encountered at 10E–11A. The campaign proceeds on Socrates' suggestion that Piety is a part but not the whole of Justice and that the task before them is to specify what part of Justice Piety is (12C–E). Euthyphro makes three attempts at the specification. Each successor is supposed to respond to Socrates' questioning by making more precise something left unclear by its predecessor. By the time Euthyphro puts forward the third attempt, however, he appears so shell shocked by the barrage of Socrates' questions that it is not even clear whether he remembers that Piety is supposed by them to be a part of Justice. Here are the attempts, baptized by their Stephanus page numbers:

- (12E) Piety is the part of Justice that is concerned with the care (*therapeia*) of the gods.
- (13D) Piety is the part of Justice that is of service to (*hupēretikē*) the gods.
- (14D) Piety is [the part of Justice that is?] concerned with a knowledge of how to give to, and beg from, the gods.

Socrates deploys the Craft Analogy, ubiquitous in the early dialogues, in criticism of the (12E) definition. The care of horses, dogs, and cattle is given

over to the expert few—the breeders, trainers, herdsman, and the like—who have the knowledge requisite to benefit and improve the creatures in their charge. This kind of care entails both specialized knowledge in the care provider and intended benefit to the care recipient. Socrates uses the second entailment to embarrass Euthyphro's (12E) definition. Nothing we do could possibly benefit or improve the gods; although Socrates never raises the point, he might have claimed that it would be *impious* to suppose that we could do so. Nor does he pursue the first entailment. Surely it is worth pursuing. Even if one came to think, as Plato did in the *Republic*, that the virtues of Wisdom and Courage could not be spread across the whole populace, one might still think that virtues like Justice and Self-Control can and ought to be; if Piety is a part of Justice, so should it.

The (13D) definition replaces the notion of care of the gods in favor of the notion of service to the gods. This initially sounds more promising, for one may serve the gods without improving them. Socrates takes the service relationship to be like the relation of apprentice to master. Invoking another aspect of the Craft Analogy, Socrates points out that apprentices help their masters to achieve their masters' goals, whether it be in treating the ill or in building a ship or a house. What goals, then, do we help the gods to achieve? Euthyphro's answer, "Many fine things," does not tell Socrates *what* fine things the gods bring about specifically with our aid. And, although Socrates does not press the point, there is another question waiting in the wings, suggested by the line of questioning aimed at the (12E) definition: what reason do we have to think that there are *any* goals for which the gods need or want our help? What can they achieve with our aid that they cannot achieve just as easily without our aid?

Socrates construes the (14D) definition as describing the pious person as *emporikē* (14E), possessed of a bartering skill of a certain kind. It is clear enough that there are many things we need to beg from the gods: in fact, Socrates is happy to say that every good we have we receive from them. But what can we give the gods in return? Or is it that pious people are such skillful barterers that they wring all sorts of goods from the gods without giving them anything in return? Euthyphro responds by saying that what we give the gods are honor (*timē*), respect (*gera[s]*), and gratitude (*charis*), gifts that please them without benefitting them (15A–B), gifts, in fact, that they love. Socrates now pounces for the last time. Euthyphro's (14D) definition entails that Piety is essentially connected to what the gods love, and so Euthyphro has to face anew all the problems that beset the (9D) definition.

At the end of the *Euthyphro*, then, the score is Socrates: 4, Euthyphro: 0. But remember that Plato was pitching *and* calling the balls and strikes. Perhaps some instant replay is in order.

III. Definition and Explanation

Let us first examine the (9D) definition. Socrates takes the point of his elenchus to be that the (9D) definition must be given up. But Socrates' case succeeds only because he takes advantage of two assumptions, *Euthyphro's Concession* and the *Definitional Ideal*.

Euthyphro's Concession is simply his acquiescence in propositions (3) and (4). Taken in tandem with the (9D) definition, the concession is surprising, because the (9D) definition appears to give a subjectivistic account of Piety while the concession of (3) and (4) seems to pay tribute to objectivism. It is tempting to think that Euthyphro's Concession is not only surprising but unwise, because the *reductio* that Socrates works on the (9D) definition shows that given propositions (1) and (2) as truisms, propositions (9D), (3), and (4) form an inconsistent triad. It is certainly true that Euthyphro is not *compelled* to concede (3) and (4). Moreover, the swiftness with which Euthyphro signs on to (3) and (4)—it happens without comment, let alone protest, in one line at 10D—precludes any development of the second horn of the dilemma presented at the beginning of this essay. Let us note for now what we get if we deny what Euthyphro affirmed and affirm what he denied:

(Anti-3) It is not the case that the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious.

(Anti-4) The pious is pious because it is loved by the gods.

We shall return to Euthyphro's Concession later.

Let us turn our attention to the other major assumption of Socrates' elenchus of the (9D) definition, the Definitional Ideal. After the stage setting with which the *Euthyphro* begins, Socrates asks Euthyphro to tell him "what kind of a thing godliness and ungodliness are"; to say "what the pious is" (5C–D). Put that way, the request is informal and unformed: Euthyphro might reasonably have been expected to satisfy it in any number of ways. By the time Plato gets to 10E–11A, however, Socrates has honed his conception of what is called for down to razor-sharp precision. It is unfortunate that Plato does not let us see the principle that generates the contradictions mentioned above, for whatever the principle may be, it is an important component of the Definitional Ideal. All we are allowed to see is the transformation of (3) into (3') and (1i) into (1i'). We can infer that whatever its exact contours, the principle that sanctions those transformations must permit substitution of terms in intensional contexts governed by "because." Marc Cohen suggests that what is called for is a "principle of substitutivity of definitional equivalents, understanding definitional equivalents to be a pair of expressions one of which is a definition of the other," to the effect that such

expressions “must be mutually replaceable *salva veritate*.”⁶ Richard Sharvy argues that Cohen’s principle, although sufficient to underwrite the Socratic transformations, also sanctions clearly invalid transformations. Sharvy’s own suggestion, where “ α ” and “ β ” range over adjectives and “ α -ness” and “ β -ness” range over corresponding abstract nouns, is the principle that [if α -ness =_{df} β -ness, then for anything that is α , it is α because it is β].⁷

We need not choose up sides on these principles. We need only observe that whatever principle comports best with Plato’s thought, it will underscore the fact that for Socrates, to “say what the pious is” is to give a *definition* of Piety, an account that specifies the essence of Piety. For if *any* pair of terms will tolerate substitution into “because” contexts, it would seem that they must be related as *definiendum* and *definiens*. Consider, for example, two terms that bear only the relation of necessary coextensiveness, a relation that is tight but not as tight as definitional equivalence. Necessarily coextensive terms are not generally interchangeable in “because” contexts. Suppose that the terms “water” and “H₂O” are necessarily coextensive but not related as *definiendum* to *definiens*. Truth is not preserved in the transformation of “Fish can respire in water because water is H₂O” into “Fish can respire in water because water is water.”⁸ If you think that “water” and “H₂O” are related as *definiendum* to *definiens* (and not, say, as *analysandum* to *analysans*), so that the example does not illustrate the point I am trying to make, then consider instead the pair “triangular” and “trilateral,” neither of which is plausibly part or the whole of the definition of the other. Then compare “This figure has one side less than a quadrilateral because it is trilateral” with “This figure has one side less than a quadrilateral because it is triangular.”

Suppose instead that we do have two terms related as *definiendum* to *definiens*, perhaps “triangle” and “closed, plane, rectilinear figure with exactly three interior angles.” It may be that terms like these can pass the substitution test; if they cannot, then the principle behind Plato’s reliance on substitution to refute the (9D) definition is misplaced. Let us set that issue aside for now, however, for there is another component of the Definitional Ideal that I wish to expose. Socrates takes the importance of the project of definition to be this: *if one cannot provide a definition of X, then one cannot claim to know with certainty which things are X and which things are not X*.⁹ Euthyphro claims, for example,

⁶ Cohen, “Socrates on the Definition of Piety,” p. 10.

⁷ Sharvy, “Euthyphro 9d–11b,” p. 132. My square brackets are intended to function as Quine’s quasi quotes.

⁸ Cohen’s principle will sanction this transformation if “water” and “H₂O” are related as *definiendum* and *definiens*. Sharvy’s principle will not.

⁹ See Terence Irwin, *Plato’s Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), §§12–16.

to know that prosecuting his own father is pious. If he lacks knowledge of the definition of Piety, his claim to certainty about prosecuting his father is unfounded. (In similar fashion, in the *Meno* Socrates professes not to know whether virtue can be taught because he does not know what the definition of virtue is.)

Although I shall not pass judgment on the truth or utility of the Definitional Ideal, two observations are in order. First, the Definitional Ideal does not encode the only principles applicable to the enterprise of giving an account. Second, that enterprise can commence and proceed fruitfully in the absence of satisfying the Definitional Ideal.¹⁰ An account of Piety need not be a definition but rather an *explanation* of Piety, something that outlines its religious dimensions, something that may in fact require embedding Piety in a more comprehensive theory about the human, the divine, and the relations between them. Not only may we be able to give such an explanatory account in the absence of a definition of Piety, but in fact, to insist that we cannot proceed until we have met the Definitional Ideal may have the effect of stifling the task of giving an account.

The account I have to offer is underdeveloped and undefended here. I only claim for it that it is neither unfamiliar nor indefensible. Much of it can be found in historically important Christian philosophical theology. Some of it fits, moreover, with the opinions hinted at by Euthyphro and rejected by Socrates. The account has two major components, one *metaphysical*, the other *moral*. The metaphysical component interacts directly with the examination of the (12E), (13D), and (14D) definitions. That examination will provide a segue to the moral component, which in turn will lead us back to the issues surrounding the (9D) definition.

IV. Divine Sovereignty

The metaphysical component is a doctrine about God's *sovereignty over creation*. The doctrine maintains that God exists *a se*, depending on nothing else for his existence. Everything else depends for its existence upon the existence of God. The notion of everything else's dependence on God has been radically expressed in the history of philosophical theology by the doctrines of divine creation *ex nihilo* and divine continuous creation. According to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, God is the creator of everything else that exists, bringing all other things into existence not by *fabrication* out of independently preexisting raw materials—as does Plato's Demiurge in the *Timaeus*—but rather by an

¹⁰ The middle and late dialogues downplay the Definitional Ideal without abandoning it.

activity whose proper opposite is *annihilation*. This doctrine entails the claim that everything that we have—indeed, everything that we *are*—we have received from God. We have the ability to compose, decompose, and recompose the material constituents of the world. We have the ability to develop or fail to develop our own characters and talents. But these abilities supervene on a base that would not exist were it not for God's creative activity. The doctrine of continuous creation maintains that this same creative activity is required to keep created things in existence over any stretch of time.¹¹ Together these two doctrines entail that everything we are, everything we have, and everything we do depends radically on God's creating and preserving activity.

These aspects of God's sovereignty over creation appear to make the questions that Socrates directs at the (12E), (13D), and (14D) definitions even more poignant. How can one benefit God, who is utterly self-sufficient? How can one improve God, who is perfect? How can one aid omnipotent God? How can one give something to God when everything one has already belongs to him?

Let us take these questions in turn. First, how can one benefit self-sufficient God? If *benefit* is opposed to *harm* and if harming a person entails injuring or damaging that person, then it appears that just as we cannot harm God, so we cannot benefit him. Nothing that we do can promote God's well-being, increase his advantage, or repair an injury done to him. For similar reasons, it would seem that the response to the second question, "How can one improve perfect God?" is that we cannot literally improve God's lot in any way. Alongside of harm, however, there is another familiar concept, the concept of *offense*. There are many ways in which people can be offended by the behavior of others without being harmed by that behavior. I can offend you by insulting you or someone you love. I can offend you by flouting the ideals and projects that you hold dear. I can offend you by engaging in behavior that you find rude, tasteless, or repulsive. I can offend you by ignoring you or snubbing you. I can offend you by spurning an act of graciousness on your part. I can offend you by trespassing on what rightfully belongs to you (whether or not I thereby harm you or your property) or by overstepping my bounds in some other way that affronts your person. And I can offend you by disobeying your orders when you are in a position of legitimate authority over me. Many would claim that we can offend God in many if not all of these ways, and perhaps in other ways as

¹¹ See Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 55–79; and Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Conservation, Secondary Causes, and Occasionalism," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 50–73.

well. Traditional theology has a rich vocabulary covering this territory, including not only such redolent terms as “blasphemy,” “sacrilege,” and “idolatry” but also the universal catch-all, “sin.”

This is not the occasion to explore the fine-grained contours of the territory. Instead, let me point out the following difference between harm and offense. It is possible to harm a person without the person’s ever realizing it. I do not mean simply that a person can be harmed yet never discover the identity of the agent of harm. I mean that a person can be harmed yet never discover that the harm has been done. Jones might slander Smith, thereby causing Smith to lose his job, but Jones might commit the slander in such a manner that Smith never becomes aware of it. Perhaps such cases of unrecognized harm are rare. That is not the point. The point is that in contrast to harm, a person cannot—logically cannot—*be* offended without *having taken* offense. In order for my behavior to offend you, it must register on you at some level and you must interpret it as offensive. You might misinterpret my behavior, reading into it intentions that I do not in fact have. You might not even be consciously aware that you have become offended by my behavior. Yet it remains true that while harm is *done*, offense must be *taken*.

No one can harm God; a fortiori, no one can harm omniscient God without God’s knowing it. Anyone can offend God, and when omniscient God takes offense, it is never based on a misinterpretation of the offender’s behavior. Is there something that stands opposite to “offense” as “benefit” stands to “harm”? And if there is, is it something that we can do to or for God?

I think that the answer to both these questions is “yes.” The answer will begin to emerge as we look at the other two critical questions occasioned by the (12E), (13D), and (14D) definitions. The third question was “How can one aid omnipotent God?” Consider a mundane analogy. You are easily capable of setting the table for dinner by yourself. Your child, however, wants to help. So you and your child set the table together. It may be that you could have set the table more quickly and efficiently by yourself. But you recognize that there is more to life than speed and efficiency. So it may be with omnipotent God vis-à-vis us. There is nothing in the concept of omnipotence that precludes an omnipotent being from letting another, much less powerful being contribute to a project that the omnipotent being could have carried out alone.

We come, finally, to the last question, “How can one give something to a God who already has everything?” Consider once again a mundane analogy. Your child wants to give you a present on your birthday. She saves up her allowance, that is, the money *you* gave her, goes to a rummage sale, and buys a book for you which, unbeknownst to her, *you* donated to the rummage sale. The analogy is of course not perfect, but I take it that the lesson is clear enough. You would have to be made of obsidian not to be touched by your child’s gift, even

in—especially in—these circumstances. As someone no doubt said somewhere, it is not the gift but the giving that counts. In some cases, the real gift is the act of giving itself, the object given functioning merely as a token for what the act conveys. As Euthyphro pointed out, an act of giving can be an act that honors the recipient, an act that expresses respect for the recipient, or an act that expresses the giver's gratitude to the recipient. In any of these cases the act of giving can confer value on the gift object well beyond the object's intrinsic value. What Euthyphro did not say—I shall return to this point—is that the act of giving can also be an act of love. The scarf that you would never have picked out yourself acquires a whole new beauty when it is given to you as a token of love.

To sum up the responses to the critical questions raised by the (12E), (13D), and (14D) attempts to define Piety: we cannot benefit God in a sense of benefit that is antithetical to harm, but we may be able to benefit God in a sense of benefit that is complementary to offense. We cannot do anything to improve God. We can nevertheless assist omnipotent God. Finally, it is possible to give something to God, the giving of which is an expression of honor, respect, gratitude, or love.

The two analogies I sketched above involve the relationship between child and parent. It is natural to think along these lines in a discussion concerning Piety, since the secular application of that concept is the notion of *filial* piety. Recall, for example, that Euthyphro is prosecuting his own father on charges of impiety, probably because, as some commentators have suggested, Euthyphro believes that to prosecute his father under the circumstances is an act of filial piety that will remove the taint of moral pollution from his father. Yet in stating the (12E) definition, Euthyphro compartmentalizes Piety in such a way that it is that part of Justice that applies *only* to the gods, while “that [part of Justice] concerned with the care of men is the remaining part of Justice.” Consistent with Euthyphro's compartmentalization, there are two different ways in which we might think about the notion of filial piety. One is to insist that inasmuch as Piety can only be directed to God, there is no such thing as filial *piety*. Among the duties of human justice that typically fall upon us, there are the duties that we owe our parents. Since our parents were our immediate progenitors and—most likely—our early sustainers, it is easy enough to think of the duties we owe our parents as duties of Piety. But they are not; they are special duties of human justice. The other way to think about filial piety is to claim that there really is such a thing even though all duties of Piety are owed directly to God. For it may be that the fulfillment of Piety towards God includes, *inter alia*, the duties of filial piety. Our parents may thus be the *beneficiaries* of the duties of Piety while God is the party to whom the duties are owed. It is not important for present purposes to reach a verdict on this issue.

It is enough that the moral relationships in which we stand to our parents make the use of parent-child analogies a fruitful way of understanding Piety.

V. Divine Love

It is time to unveil the moral component of the account I wish to give of Piety. The moral component depends on the thesis that God is essentially and perfectly good. A corollary of this thesis is that for *whatever* sorts of beings God creates, God *cares for* those beings. The corollary does *not* maintain that a perfectly good, omniscient, omnipotent God must create the best of all possible worlds, even if that definite description should have a referent. God could have created beings different from us in impressive ways. God could have created, perhaps *has* created, rational beings who have greater cognitive capacities than we, or who feel no pain and have no need for feeling pain, or who cannot be destroyed by any process now at work in nature. Such beings might be better than we are. My claim is only that he cares for us and cares for them (or would care for them, were he to bring them into existence).

Norman Kretzmann has recently argued that God *must* create *something*, which does not entail that there is something which is such that God must create *it*.¹² Kretzmann's claim is rather that God cannot refrain from creating altogether, that this divine effulgence is a consequence of God's perfect goodness as understood on the Dionysian Principle (*Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and [thereby] of being*), and that the necessity under which God thus acts is the necessity of his own nature. Thus, on Kretzmann's view, God's "inability" not to create is analogous to God's "inability" to commit suicide. The thesis that I am plumping for is related to but independent of Kretzmann's. My thesis maintains that it is necessarily the case that for anything, x , if God creates x , then God cares for x .

So far I have used the notion of God's caring for his creatures in a generic sense, as if it were on all fours with the concern that a craftsman might extend to the inanimate products of his craft. But some of God's creatures are conscious, and of those conscious creatures, some are capable of having an infirm, partial understanding of their creator. I shall use the term *love* for the care that God bestows on these creatures. Unlike the unconscious parts of nature, these creatures are capable of responding reciprocally to God's care for them. Some of them can thus enter into a loving relationship with God.

¹² Norman Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?," in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 208–228.

We seem now to have strayed far from the fields of the *Euthyphro*. Socrates and Euthyphro converge on the opinion that Piety is a part of Justice. But what has love got to do with justice? To put it in traditional terms, Justice is a cardinal moral virtue, developed naturally by our acting as the just person acts. But love of God, or Charity, is a theological virtue, not subject to natural acquisition but bestowed on those who have it by the supernatural activity of God.¹³ Euthyphro only mentions paying honor, respect, and gratitude to the gods. It is clear that Justice can demand that one honor, respect, and be grateful to another. It is also clear that one can satisfy these demands of Justice without one's thereby loving the other. So, to repeat, what has love got to do with Justice?

If you are like me, you might be tempted to hold the following three views. Love does not have much to do with Justice. Piety is a part of Justice. Piety has a lot to do with love. If you are not fond of holding incompatible views, then you might be inclined to wonder whether Piety comes in two varieties, not one. As you have browsed through the 800,000 or so words of the Second Part of the Second Part of St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, you may have noticed the curious fact that *two* of its questions are labeled "Of Piety," Questions 101 and 121. The replication is not accidental, for, according to Aquinas, Piety leads a double life. Question 101 describes the sort of Piety that is a part of Justice. Question 121 describes the sort of Piety that is a gift of the Holy Spirit; unlike the first kind, this kind cannot be developed in oneself by habituation. I shall call the two "natural piety" and "supernatural piety" respectively. Many things could be said about the distinction as Aquinas sees it. I wish to make only a few observations that are germane to the issues we are investigating. First, although the bulk of the discussion of natural piety is given over to filial piety, along with the piety we owe to our country (*patria*), Aquinas insists that natural piety is owed to God above all else. What unites God, parents, and country under the heading of natural piety, according to Aquinas, is the fact that each is, in its own way, a source of our existence and our becoming what we are (a *principium* of our *esse* and our *gubernatio*), God being a source superior to the other two. I believe that it is Aquinas's view that we should know that we owe a duty of natural piety to God just by knowing what we can know about God by means of natural reason, that is, reason unaided by revelation.

Aquinas claims that what distinguishes supernatural piety from natural piety is that in the case of supernatural piety, we are led to worship God not only as ultimate source of our existence and upbringing, which is the function of natural piety, nor even merely to worship God as *Creator*, which is the function of the separate virtue of religion, but to worship God as *Father* (IIaIIae, q.

¹³ See William E. Mann, "Theological Virtues," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998).

121, a. 1, reply to the second objection). Aquinas does not have much more to say in elaboration of this suggestive notion. In the context of our discussion, I believe that Aquinas's view contains a negative element and a positive element. The negative element is that although supernatural piety may involve honoring, respecting, and being grateful to God, it cannot be reduced to these activities. The positive element is that supernatural piety involves loving God in a way that presupposes God's love of us as finite, created beings.¹⁴

Aquinas describes the theological virtue of Charity as *amicitia* between God and person.¹⁵ It would be a mistake to confuse Piety—even supernatural piety—with Charity. But it is not a mistake, I suggest, to think of supernatural piety as something essential to the establishment and maintenance of *amicitia*. Consider the following fable. Imagine that some knowledgeable, powerful, and wealthy king from a distant land, for reasons utterly mysterious to Amanda, has taken an interest in Amanda's welfare. We may suppose further that this king is the soul of discretion. Although he could dazzle Amanda with an overt display of his wisdom, wealth, power, and affection, he chooses not to. Instead, he manages to drop hints, encoded in various written works and reported by various emissaries, about his affection for Amanda. At first, Amanda might react in disbelief: the hints are ambiguous, the emissaries themselves only claim to know fragments of the story, and it remains inexplicable to Amanda what such a person could find to admire in her. But Amanda's thoughts turn on many occasions to this king. Amanda reads more about his humanitarian exploits and projects. Amanda finds herself moved by those projects, adopting them as projects that Amanda herself wishes to further. Eventually Amanda comes to admire—we may even suppose that Amanda comes to love—this king.

Up to this point the king and Amanda, in spite of their mutual affection for one another, have not entered into a full-fledged relationship of *amicitia*. The mutual love between the two of them has not yet been fully shared or communicated. Amanda has become convinced by a thousand and one hints and ever-so-subtle gifts—or what Amanda now *takes* to be hints and gifts, for there are still elements of ambiguity and risk—that this king loves her. Amanda loves the king, but how does Amanda let the king know that? Amanda cannot now visit the king in the king's land. Amanda could inform one of the king's emissaries, asking that the information be passed along. It occurs to Amanda,

¹⁴ Christian doctrines of the Trinity typically maintain that the love between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is a love of coequals. Love between God and creatures is not love between coequals.

¹⁵ For more on *amicitia* and related concepts, see William E. Mann, "Hope," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 251–280, reprinted as Chapter 17 of this volume.

however, that that approach is neither necessary nor sufficient. Not necessary, because if the king is as knowledgeable as Amanda believes him to be, he already knows about Amanda's love for him. Not sufficient, because Amanda believes that an essential component of communicating or sharing *amicitia* is *expressing* one's love for the beloved *to* the beloved, even if Amanda knows that the king already knows of Amanda's love.

What form should Amanda's expression take? Different emissaries offer Amanda different prescriptions. As Amanda reflects on this welter of information, she realizes that what is most important is that her expression be *received* as unambiguously as possible and be *interpreted* for what it is; namely, a confession of love. Amanda also realizes that in an important sense, the *amicitia* that is shared in this situation is not love between equals. The status of the king whom Amanda loves makes a significant difference, a difference that should be reflected in the way in which Amanda's love is expressed. It would be presumptuous of Amanda, for instance, to express her love in a way that suggests that her beloved might somehow have *need* of her devotion (as opposed to *wanting* it). At the same time, Amanda wants to avoid conveying the impression that her love is obsequious, servile, or sycophantic, a spurious "love" blended solely out of feelings of fear, desire for self-promotion, and calculations of personal advancement to be achieved by appeasing and exploiting her wealthy, more powerful beloved. (And remember that this particular beloved is, by the hypothesis of my fable, very wise to the ways of impostors.) The expression of Amanda's love, then, should not be a proposal of mutually beneficial joint venture, as might be appropriate for the love between two equals. Nor should the expression of Amanda's love be motivated by unilateral personal gain, even though in the case at hand, both Amanda and her beloved realize that Amanda is the one who stands to gain most by entering into and continuing the relationship. We might say that Amanda wants the expression of her love to be offered, received, and interpreted as an expression of her desire to become and remain *affiliated*.

Here my fable ends. As you scanned the word "affiliated," you recalled its etymology, from *ad* and *filius*. The fable should not be supposed to capture all that is involved in the notion of supernatural piety. It does illustrate, however, how and what kind of love might exist between persons who are vastly unequal. Recall our earlier discussion of harm versus offense. At the time I left unanswered the question of what sort of activity might be opposite the sort of activity that offends God. Since there may be several different ways of offending God, there may be as many opposites as there are sorts of offense. Surely acts of supernatural piety, however, are to be counted among these opposites. In particular, acts of supernatural piety that are expressions of the love of affiliation would seem to be the opposite of offenses to God that

overtly ignore or reject God's invitation to enter into a bond of *amicitia* with him. In the interests of theoretical unification, some might clamor to say that every offense to God is a rejection of his love; thus, that every opposite activity is an expression of love for him. This kind of reductive attempt seems too simplistic. Every criminal act violates the law. It does not follow that every act that is noncriminal shows respect for the law. And even if there is some attenuated sense of "respect" according to which every noncriminal act does show respect for the law, it is still important to partition criminal behavior into different categories and to partition noncriminal behavior into different categories.

Return to the point made earlier about offense being the sort of thing that must be taken. Taking offense involves registering some person's behavior and interpreting that behavior as offensive. In mundane cases, there is room for cognitive slippage on the part of all parties involved. I may not realize that my behavior offends you. You may misperceive or misinterpret my behavior. In the case of an expression of supernatural piety for God, whatever failures of cognitive transmission there might be must be on the side of the human transmitter, not the divine receiver. Omniscient God can neither misperceive my behavior nor misinterpret it. What is involved in God's interpreting a person's behavior as a case of supernatural piety? Is God an inerrant recorder of acts that come before him already bearing the stamp of supernatural piety? Or is God's acceptance of an act required to make the act count as an expression of supernatural piety?

In the twentieth-century spirit of leaving no noun or adjective unverbbed, I introduce the barbarism "superpietize," which means *to perform an act of supernatural piety*. ("Expiate" is in the etymological neighborhood, but both too narrow and too broad in meaning for my purposes.) We may then put the issue raised in the previous paragraph in Rylean terms or in Austinian terms. In Rylean terms, we may ask whether "superpietize" is a task verb, a verb akin to "run," requiring mere performance for its correct ascription to an agent, or whether it is instead an achievement verb, a verb more akin to "win," whose correct ascription requires not only performance but also some kind of success—in the case of "superpietize," acceptance of one's performance by God as the initiation or maintenance of affiliative *amicitia*.¹⁶ In Austinian terms, we may ask whether a particular locutionary act¹⁷ that has the illocutionary force of

¹⁶ See Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson and Company, Ltd., 1949), pp. 149–153.

¹⁷ Here we may want to extend the notion of a locutionary act in a way presumably not anticipated by Austin, to include cases of interior speech or prayer. Normal communicants need some indication of your locutionary act available to their senses. But not God.

superpietizing has divine acceptance and reciprocation as an accidental perlocutionary sequel at best, or whether instead the perlocutionary consequence is an intrinsic object of the illocutionary act.¹⁸ In other, less highfalutin words, is “He superpietized” like “He apologized” or like “He made amends”? On the second Austinian option or on the hypothesis that “superpietize” is a Rylean achievement verb, “His superpietizing was successful” will be trivially true if true at all. On the first Austinian option or on the hypothesis that “superpietize” is a Rylean task verb, “His superpietizing was successful” will never be *trivially* true.¹⁹

Since I coined the term, you might think that I would be able to provide the answer. But I am not. The sketchy account that I have developed here does not entail a decision one way or the other. I can point out a connection, however, between the possible answers and Euthyphro’s Concession. Suppose first that “superpietize” is a task verb or that its intended upshot, establishing or maintaining *amicitia* with God, is adventitious. In that case it seems natural enough to accept analogues to Euthyphro’s Concession, to wit:

- (3*) Acts of superpietizing are loved by God because they are acts of superpietizing.
- (4*) It is not the case that acts of superpietizing are acts of superpietizing because they are loved by God.

It may help to consider an analogy here. We are considering for the nonce the hypothesis that “superpietize” is in relevant respects like “apologize” rather than “make amends.” Suppose that Abel owes Baker an apology. Suppose further that Baker is a magnanimous soul eager to accept Abel’s apology. In these circumstances it would be true that,

- (3#) Abel’s act of apologizing is desired by Baker because it is (or would be) an act of apologizing,

and that,

- (4#) It is not the case that Abel’s act of apologizing is (or would be) an act of apologizing because it is desired by Baker.

¹⁸ See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), Lectures 8–10.

¹⁹ When I read an earlier version of this chapter, William Alston reminded me of this example from *Henry IV, Part One: Glendower*: I can call spirits from the vasty deep. *Hotspur*: Why, so can I, or so can any man; But will they come when you do call for them?

Baker's desire is a desire *for* an apology, not a desire that *makes* Abel's performance an apology. Similarly, on the task-verb, adventitious-perlocutionary-sequel account of superpietizing, God loves acts of supernatural piety for what they are, but God's loving them does not make them what they are.

Suppose alternatively that "superpietize" is a success verb, or a verb whose correct ascription to an agent logically requires that the agent's act receive divine acceptance and reciprocation. That supposition fits more closely (Anti-3) and (Anti-4), the antitheses of Euthyphro's Concession:

(Anti-3*) It is not the case that acts of superpietizing are loved by God because they are acts of superpietizing.

(Anti-4*) Acts of superpietizing are acts of superpietizing because they are loved by God.

(Anti-4*) maintains that what makes an act of superpietizing count as an act of superpietizing is that it is accepted by God, just as Baker's acceptance of Abel's act of making amends makes Abel's act count as an act of making amends and not merely, say, an act of apologizing. (Anti-3*) can thus be understood in the following way. Acts of superpietizing do not issue from the offerer *as* acts of superpietizing, any more than Abel's act of apologizing is by itself an act of making amends. To describe an act at the time that it is committed as a case of superpietizing is a sort of prolepsis.²⁰ What makes an act of acknowledging God as Father an act of supernatural piety is the act's being lovingly accepted by God. We might say that supernatural piety *supervenes* on the relevant complex of activities undertaken by the worshipper and God.²¹

Is it important that we choose between these two alternative analyses of supernatural piety? Here are two issues that will *not* be affected by our choice. First, anyone who wishes to defend an analogue of the (9D) definition of Piety can espouse (3*) and (4*), the analogues of Euthyphro's Concession, and still avoid the Socratic elenchus by insisting that not every successful explanatory account need live up to the lofty standards set by the substitution test and the Definitional Ideal that lies behind it. Second, one's choice between (3*) and (4*), on the one hand, and (Anti-3*) and (Anti-4*), on the other, is by and large independent of one's commitment to theological objectivism or theological

²⁰ As normally understood, prolepsis involves an anachronistic *temporal* anticipation: stock examples are "the precolonial United States" and "the two brothers and their murdered man rode past fair Florence." One interpretation of God's eternality entails that all actions, human and divine, are simultaneously present to God. In that case, the notion of prolepsis can be understood to apply to the staging of *effects* of God's actions on temporal creatures. See Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78 (1981), pp. 429–458.

²¹ I owe this suggestion to Peter Hare.

subjectivism. One would normally associate theological objectivism, the thesis that moral values and obligations are independent of God's will, with (3*) and (4*). Yet it is possible to be a theological objectivist and to subscribe to (Anti-3*) and (Anti-4*). All one has to do is maintain that there is some core of normative propositions whose validity is independent of God's willing activity but that nevertheless, when it comes to supernatural piety, God's will is determinative. Conversely, one can be a theological subjectivist and accept the seemingly objective (3*) and (4*). Theological subjectivism maintains that all moral standards are fixed by God's fiat. That position is compatible with maintaining that once God has decreed what constitutes supernatural piety, God will unfailingly commit himself to loving acts of supernatural piety for what they are.

What then is Piety? Socrates lowered the philosophical boom on Euthyphro's suggestion that Piety is what the gods love. The account that I have sketched here suggests that Euthyphro got us off to a decent start. For a modern-day descendant of Euthyphro, imbued with a bit of Christian philosophical theology, can maintain that Piety is what God loves in us when we love God as Father.²²

²² An earlier version of this chapter was read in Buffalo at the 1994 Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers. I thank William Alston, David Christensen, Peter Hare, Derk Pereboom, Edward Wierenga, and an anonymous referee of *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* for comments and encouragement.

Hope

Paul concludes the well-known thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians by saying that “faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” When ordinary folk and theologians turn their attention to this passage, they typically suppose that Paul was commending faith, hope, and love (or charity) as three different yet compatible things. In supposing this they have grounds in Paul’s own testimony. For he tells us that had he faith enough to move mountains, he would still be nothing without love (1 Cor. 13:2) and that one has faith in Christ Jesus, love for all the saints, and hope laid up for one in heaven (Col. 1:4–5).

If faith, hope, and love are different, two general questions will occur immediately to the philosophically inclined. What sorts of things are they? How do they differ from each other? Although I address these questions, I do so only insofar as they are germane to the central issue of this chapter—what is hope, that it should be in the company of faith and love? It can easily appear as if the credentials of hope are counterfeit for two reasons, one having to do with hope’s autonomous identity, the other with hope’s laudability.

What could hope do that is not done by faith or love? Hope appears to be in danger of being annexed, either by faith or by love. For if one’s hope for one’s salvation—that is what Paul takes the content of hope to be—is a *belief* that one will be saved, then hope seems to be just a part of faith. Suppose, then, that hope is a *desire* for one’s salvation. In that case there seems to be a territorial dispute between hope and love, a dispute that, no matter how it is settled, reflects unfavorably on hope. Ought I to hope for your salvation as earnestly as I hope for my salvation? If the answer is Yes, then it is natural to think that hope is simply a part of love, since in this case I am just one among many about whom I should wish and work for the best, which is surely included in the notion of Christian charity. If on the other hand the answer is No, hope retains its autonomous identity but only by being taxed with a disagreeable burden of egoism. For now it appears that my hope for my salvation takes precedence over my hope for your salvation (assuming that the latter hope is even possible), and in

that case, hope is shot through with a kind of self-love for which I deserve no moral credit. Faith and love are hard to achieve: they make demands on aspiring Christians that are anything but easy to satisfy. But hoping for one's own salvation might seem to be as easy as falling off a log. How can hope count as a great thing if it, like wishful thinking, is so apparently—even unavoidably—easy to have? Perhaps true Christian love or charity is incompatible with hope: to the extent to which one has the former, one cannot have the latter. But then Paul's yoking together of faith, hope, and love will have to be understood in some way different from the interpretation typically placed on it by ordinary folk and theologians.

I shall examine and defend hope's credentials in the face of these kinds of suspicions. I shall examine and defend, that is, the case for the autonomous identity of hope, its compatibility with faith and love, and its claim to moral legitimacy within the framework of Christian ethical theorizing. The examination will make heavy use of historical texts, not because they are historical, but because they contain some of the finest discussions available. I begin with a brief excursion into St. Augustine's and St. Thomas Aquinas's remarks on the extent of hope. I then turn to a series of passages from Martin Luther's *Lectures on Romans*. Together these passages constitute an elaborate and sophisticated argument, one of whose tacit implications is the indictment of hope. The shrewdness and subtlety of Luther's argument can best be appreciated by seeing how it can be defended sympathetically against a number of philosophical objections. Even so, I ultimately offer an argument for rejecting Luther's view, placing in its stead the picture of hope that emerges from a reading of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*.

I. Augustine and Aquinas on the Extent of Hope

Early in the *Enchiridion*, Augustine offers the following observations in order to contrast faith and hope:

Faith, then, is both of things bad and good, since both good things and bad things are believed, and this faith is good, not bad. Faith is also of things past and present and future. For we believe in the death of Christ, which is now past; we believe that he sits at the right hand of the Father, which now is; we believe that he will be coming as judge, which is future. Again, faith is of things of one's own and of others; for everyone believes both of himself and of other people and other things that they began to exist at some time, and were not somehow everlasting. We believe many things that pertain to religion, not only

concerning other people but even concerning the angels. Hope, however, is held of nothing but good things, of nothing but future things, and of those things pertaining to him who sustains the hope. On account of these given reasons, faith is distinguished from hope, by name as well as by rational difference.¹

The third contrast between faith and hope pointed out by Augustine asserts what we may call the self-exclusiveness thesis about hope. Since faith is said to be directed toward “things of one’s own and of others,” hope, in contrast, pertains exclusively to oneself and not to others. It is not clear, however, whether Augustine sees the implications of this thesis, taken *au pied de la lettre*. Near the end of the *Enchiridion*, Augustine says that the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer are expressions of hope.² On a literal, unimaginative interpretation of Augustine’s claim, it would seem to follow that when we utter the petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are praying distributively, not collectively: *I* ask for *my* daily bread, *you* for *your* daily bread, and so on. Although it is possible to place this gloss on the petition, it is difficult to square the gloss with any plausibly rich notion of Christian fellowship.³

Aquinas may have seen and sought to avoid that interpretation of Augustine’s remarks. He cites Augustine’s pronouncement about the self-exclusiveness of hope in the *sed contra* to *Summa theologiae*, IIaIIae, q. 17, a. 3: Whether One Can Hope for Another’s Eternal Happiness.⁴ Aquinas’s resolution is to distinguish two ways in which one can hope for something. One can hope for something absolutely or “from the presupposition of another” (*ex praesuppositione alterius*). It is Aquinas’s contention that speaking absolutely, I can hope only for what pertains to me: “Hope directly regards one’s own good, and not that which pertains to another.” But if I am united to another person by love, I can hope for that person’s eternal life as well as for my own.

¹ St. Augustine, *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate*, 2.8. My translation is based on the Latin text in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontifici, 1969), 46:51–52.

² St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 30.114–116.

³ The version of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 is preceded by Jesus’ injunction not to make a show of one’s praying, as the hypocrites do, but rather to pray in private (Matthew 6:5–6). It is not clear whether this injunction is intended to apply to the Lord’s Prayer, but even if it is, Augustine’s account of hope makes it hard to see why the petitions of the prayer are in the plural, not the singular.

⁴ All citations from the *Summa theologiae* refer to the Leonine text in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opera omnia*, 7 vols., edited by Roberto Busa (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag / Günther Holzboog, 1980), vol. 2. Subsequent references to the *Summa* use the abbreviation *ST* and cite part, question, and article numbers.

Aquinas's distinction raises two critical questions. The first concerns the Augustinian thesis of the self-exclusiveness of hope. Neither Augustine nor Aquinas tarries to justify the thesis. What justification can it have? Second, if the thesis is true, how is it that love can somehow alter the situation, allowing the lover to extend the field of hope to include the beloved? It might seem that to the extent to which we take the self-exclusiveness thesis seriously, we should deny the Thomistic extension. How can Aquinas have it both ways?

The self-exclusiveness thesis need not and probably should not be construed as a thesis about human motivation. Think of it not as a substantive thesis about our psychological constitution—to the effect, say, that we might have been, but just happen not to be, the sorts of beings who are able to hope for what does not pertain to us. Think of the self-exclusiveness thesis instead as holding that the notion of one's hoping for what does not pertain to one is incoherent. On this interpretation, there is something unintelligible about the following narrative: "It is no concern of mine that event *E* should happen. *E*'s happening is utterly unconnected to all my interests, desires, and projects. Nevertheless, I hope that *E* happens."⁵ To hope that *E* happens is just to have, or to adopt, *E*'s happening as one of one's concerns. In this respect, the concept of hope is like the concept of fear. One cannot fear something that one knows will have no adverse effect on one's interests, concerns, or projects. It would seem, similarly, that one cannot hope for something that one knows will have no positive effect on one's interests, concerns, or projects. The sort of unintelligibility involved in these cases is more akin to pragmatic inconsistency than to straightforward logical contradiction. "I hope that *E* happens, but it is no concern of mine that *E* happens" has a saying-and-taking-back quality more similar to "It is raining, but I do not believe it" than to "*P* and not-*P*."

There are two noteworthy features to the self-exclusiveness thesis construed in this way. The thesis is neutral with respect to psychological egoism. Although the *content* of one's hope—what one's hope is *for*—is always something that pertains to oneself, the thesis does not in itself maintain that the *cause* or *motive* of one's hope is always real or perceived self-interest. For all that the thesis says, a person can hope that she continues to enjoy good health because she wants to be able to continue to care for her children. Moreover, this interpretation of the thesis sheds some light on Aquinas's distinction between absolute hope and hope that presupposes another. In the case of absolute hope, the *target* of hope, that person for whom the hope is held, is identical with the subject who holds the hope. We might say that in such cases, the content of the hope *manifestly* pertains to the subject. That is, the proposition that expresses the content of the hope will typically involve explicit reference to the subject.

⁵ Alternatively, one could replace reference to *E*'s happening with reference to *F*'s being true.

In the case of hope that presupposes another, the target of hope is a person other than the subject, a person to whom the subject is united by love. The content of the hope *latently* pertains to the subject; the proposition expressing the hope need not and typically will not make explicit reference to the subject. Nevertheless, the content of the hope pertains to the subject. Insofar as one loves another, one adopts the interests, needs, and welfare of the other as one's own.⁶ It is this adoption of another's interests as one's own that allows the content still to pertain to oneself even though the target may be someone else.

If this interpretation is correct, then Aquinas extends the self-exclusiveness thesis by pointing out that some of the things that pertain to oneself may be the interests of others. Yet those who are skeptical about the credentials of hope are not likely to be mollified by the foregoing account. If hope can extend to others only by one's appropriating their interests as one's own, then a whiff of self-centeredness still remains. There is something morally laudable about hoping for the salvation of others, but it would seem that all that is morally laudable is contributed by love, not by hope. What needs to be shown is that there is something praiseworthy—or at least something morally respectable—about hope in and by itself.

II. Luther's Love and Pilgrim's Progress

There is a vivid picture in the *Lectures on Romans* of what Luther takes to be the purest sort of love that a person can and perhaps should have toward God. In setting Luther's picture before you, I warn you that I take liberties in the way in which I frame it, the light I focus on it, and the features of it to which I draw your attention. I do not believe, however, that I have tampered with the canvas itself. Some parts of the picture are obscure; I have tried to leave them that way. It is clear—or so I argue—that there is no legitimate space for hope in Luther's picture.

A person who loves God purely loves nothing but God alone. Pure love of God is a love for a being whom the lover cannot experience or comprehend: it is a love that does not know what it loves, although it knows what it does not love. Pure love is impervious to the ebb and flow of spiritual and physical goods in the lover. It is the only thing that can eradicate the lover's sinfulness and tendency to esteem his own righteousness. A person who has achieved a state of pure love does not love God for the sake of God's gifts or for some advantage.

⁶ One does not necessarily adopt or seek to advance all of the other's desires or projects. One can love another and still believe that some of the other's desires and projects are unwise, misguided, or self-destructive.

In contrast, a person who loves God for his gifts loves God primarily for what he can do or has done for her. Luther classifies this kind of impure love under the scholastic category of *amor concupiscentiae*,⁷ thereby seeking to stigmatize it. Harking back to Augustine's distinction between *uti* and *frui*,⁸ Luther claims that to love God in this impure way is to use God, not to enjoy him. The *servants* of God serve him out of a kind of motivation that betrays the same impurity. That is, they serve God either out of fear of punishment, thus unwillingly and sullenly, or out of desire for reward, thus willingly but venally. In contrast, the *children* of God serve him gladly, voluntarily, and freely, their only desire being to fulfill the will of God.⁹

Luther has more to say about what is involved in the unalloyed desire to fulfill the will of God. In the third scholium to Romans 8:28, Luther distinguishes three ranks of people predestined by God as elect. The differences between the ranks are characterized in terms of the kinds of attitudes and desires they have concerning God's will with respect to them. In the lowest rank are those who are content with the will of God, trusting that they are among the elect; these people have a categorical desire not to be among the damned. The occupants of the middle rank are people who have resigned themselves to God's will. Unlike the denizens of the lowest rank, the occupants of the middle rank have a certain kind of second-order desire; namely, a desire to want to be rejected should God will it so. Although Luther does not explicitly point out this feature of their situation, what seems to be distinctive about the people in the middle rank is that their having the second-order desire coexists with their still not having the first-order desire to be rejected should God will it so. For what distinguishes the people in the third and highest rank of the elect is that they *do* have the first-order desire to be rejected if God so wills it. Thus they presumably experience no dislocation between their first-order and second-order desires: they desire to go to hell if God wills it so, and they desire to have that desire (*W* 56:388).

Luther's tripartite division of the elect implies that the attainment of pure love of God is not necessary for salvation: the people in the lowest and middle

⁷ See, for example, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 26, a. 4.

⁸ See St. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, I, iii–v, 3–5; I, xxii, 20–21.

⁹ See Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, scholium on 5:5. The text is in Luther's *Der Brief an die Römer*, vol. 56 of the *Werke* (hereafter cited as *W*, followed by the volume number, i.e., 56, and the page numbers) (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus, 1938), pp. 305–309. On this and other passages I have consulted the translations by Wilhelm Pauck in the Library of Christian Classics edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961); and by Jacob A. O. Preus in *Luther's Works*, vol. 25 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972). The distinction between servants and children may be an adaptation of the scholastic distinction between servile and filial fear. See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, IIaIIae, q. 19, aa. 2 and 5.

ranks do not have it. It seems, then, that Luther puts forward pure love as a Christian ideal, a state that is supererogatory rather than obligatory.

Luther deploys his analysis of pure love in his scholium on Paul's pronouncement in Romans 9:3: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race." Luther interprets the passage in the following way. Paul is willing to forgo his own salvation if that would secure the salvation of the Jews. Although Paul is willing to be cut off from God, he is not thereby willing to hate God: "For this love arising from its opposite is strongest and most extreme, wherein the highest hatred [for oneself] serves as a sign of the highest love for another" (*W* 56:390). This allegedly Pauline attitude thus contrasts sharply with the attitude expressed by certain "babblers" (*garrientes*), who claim that "ordered love" (*charitas ordinata*) can only proceed to a desire for one's neighbor's salvation by way of an initial desire for one's own salvation (*W* 56:390–91).¹⁰ But the babblers' conception of love is not merely mistaken: it is Luther's further contention that it is a threat to our salvation. Luther's argument is complex. I believe that I can best present it by describing the psychological development that Luther deems necessary for a person to achieve the condition of pure love of God. The account that follows is a reconstruction of the fabric of Luther's argument, with some additional embroidery of my own in obvious places.

Suppose that Palmer is a Christian believer who until now has not thought very seriously about what may be required for her salvation.¹¹ We may suppose that Palmer has a vivid enough imagination to appreciate some of the blessings of heaven and some of the horrors of hell. In her present stage of development, Palmer wants to avoid hell and achieve salvation because she wants to do what is best for herself. Palmer loves God because she realizes that God is the only being who can vouchsafe her salvation. So far, Palmer is caught in the toils of *amor concupiscentiae*. Her attitude need not be as cynical as someone's attitude might be toward a rich but unpleasant superannuated uncle. Nevertheless, Palmer is using God, not enjoying him; she is God's servant but not God's child.

Amor concupiscentiae can only be extirpated either by an infusion of God's superabundant grace or by one's resigning oneself to hell and damnation. God's grace is not Palmer's to command. Palmer must, then, bring herself to a state of self-hatred, resignation to hell and damnation, if she is to love God perfectly. It is not enough that Palmer simply come *not to love* herself: she must come *to hate*

¹⁰ *W* 56 cites John Duns Scotus's and Gabriel Biel's commentaries on book 3, distinction 29, question 1 of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. For the *Ordinatio* version of Duns Scotus's commentary, see *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, selected and translated by Allan B. Wolter (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), pp. 454–457.

¹¹ An explanation of this Bunyanesque name: a palmer was someone who wore two crossed palm fronds in commemoration of having made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

herself. Nor does Luther suppose self-hatred to play an essential but merely instrumental role, functioning only as a corrective necessary to bring about the absence of self-love. For, according to Luther, to love God perfectly is to love the will of God and thus to conform one's will to what God wills. But God "hates, damns, and wills evil to all sinners, that is, to all of us" (W 56:392). Thus if Palmer is to will what God wills, then, because she herself is a sinner, she must hate herself and will the evil of hell for herself.¹² And Luther goes out of his way to insist that self-hatred is genuine hatred, the same mental state as hatred for another, but directed toward oneself: "We must act toward ourselves as someone acts who hates another. For he does not pretend to hate; instead he earnestly desires to destroy and kill and damn him whom he hates" (W 56:393).¹³

Now comes the first of two apparently paradoxical results. By earnestly resigning herself to hell, Palmer will escape hell and attain salvation. "For it is impossible that one who throws himself utterly upon the will of God should remain outside of God. For he wills what God wills; thus he pleases God. If he pleases, then he is loved; if loved, then saved" (W 56:391).¹⁴ Part of the hellishness of hell is that its denizens are unwilling to resign themselves to it and that is because they are unwilling to resign themselves to the will of God. Were they willing to accept damnation for God's sake, then they would escape damnation. But the damned are in a position that makes it impossible for them now to fulfill the antecedent of this counterfactual conditional. They are no longer able themselves to resign themselves—or, perhaps, even to try to resign themselves—to God's will. Their condition, brought about voluntarily by their own continued self-love, can now only be alleviated by the sheer gratuitousness of God's grace. Unlike the damned, Palmer can still at least try to bring herself to a state of resignation, and she would be a fool to defer loving God perfectly until such a time when she will no longer be able to do so.¹⁵

Palmer may wonder how to achieve a state of self-hatred and resignation. Desiring to have this attitude is not the same as having it, any more than wishing to

¹² "To love is to hate oneself, to damn [oneself], to will evil, according to this statement of Christ's: 'He who hates his soul in this world preserves it in eternal life'" (W 56:392 [John 12:25]).

¹³ Notice that Luther has come a long way from the sentiment explicitly enunciated in Romans 9:3. Paul was willing to *sacrifice* himself for the sake of the Jews, not necessarily to *repudiate* himself.

¹⁴ It may be important to distinguish, on Luther's behalf, one's desire to *become* damned from one's desire to *remain* damned. (One can make sense of this distinction even if all the damned are damned from eternity.) Palmer would receive credit for having the former sort of desire. But (depending on one's demonology) Satan may have the latter sort of desire, for which he deserves no credit.

¹⁵ For all that Luther says, God's grace may be necessary to assist Palmer during her quest. In this connection, see Eleonore Stump, "Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will," *The Journal of Philosophy* 85(1988): 395–420.

be socially poised is the same as being socially poised. Moreover—this is the second apparent paradox—if self-hatred minimally requires lack of self-love, then one cannot attain lack of self-love from a motive of self-love. “If one says: ‘But I do not love my soul in this world, because I seek a good for it in the future,’ I reply: ‘Because you do this out of love for yourself, which is temporal love, you still by that very fact love your soul in this world’” (W 56:392). Since the issues raised by reflection on this passage are crucial to understanding Luther’s position, it is worth spending some time considering it and a variation on it.

Luther’s example is cast in the form of a first-person avowal. Avowals of the form “I am not pursuing x now because I want to pursue x later” do not generally elicit the rejoinder, “You are by that very fact pursuing x now.” Luther’s imagined interlocutor avows more than that. A closer approximation is, “I am not pursuing x now because I want to pursue x later, and I have chosen not to pursue x now as a means of pursuing x later.” But Luther’s portrayal of the situation as one expressed by means of a first-person avowal dramatizes the bizarre nature of the avowal itself. Luther’s interlocutor would have to be uncommonly obtuse or self-deceived to utter it. There are situations in which one might not realize that one’s actions belie one’s words. This avowal, however, is rather a case in which the interlocutor’s words belie his self-understanding. Luther’s rejoinder points out what is a painfully obvious implication of what the interlocutor has just said: “Who wills the means to the end wills the end” seems at least as secure as “Who wills the end wills the means.”

Perhaps because he concentrates on a case expressed from the first-person perspective, Luther does not notice that an interesting alternative arises when we examine the third-person perspective. What makes the first-person avowal bizarre is that if it is sincerely uttered, we must suppose that the interlocutor virtually believes of himself simultaneously that he is *not* pursuing x while he is pursuing a course of action chosen precisely as a means to pursuing x . Consider, by way of contrast, the corresponding third-person report, “He is not pursuing x now because he wants to pursue x later, and he has chosen not to pursue x now as a means of pursuing x later.” Suppose that the report is supplemented with this explanation: “Of course, since he made that choice, some time ago, he has changed significantly, in large part as a result of making the choice. Although he now still wants to pursue x later, and although his present non- x -ish pursuits have the choice as their ancestor, his present non- x -ish pursuits are now motivated by desires whose content has nothing to do with his desire to pursue x later. In other words, the pursuits and projects that he originally chose as means have become ends in their own right.” The report, eked out in this way, does not invoke the rejoinder, “He really is pursuing x now.”

The assessment of the case expressed by the first-person avowal bids us to consider the interlocutor’s beliefs and desires as held *synchronically*. A case

described by the corresponding third-person report opens up the possibility of interpreting the agent's beliefs and desires *diachronically*, as features of a dynamic psychological process changing through time. I do not mean to suggest that all first-person avowals must be interpreted synchronically or that all third-person reports can be interpreted diachronically. For my purposes, the distinction between synchronic and diachronic cases of Luther's second apparent paradox is more important than the distinction between avowals and reports. It may seem to be a deficiency of Luther's picture that the second apparent paradox neglects diachronic cases. Luther's picture is thereby incomplete, but I argue below that this portion of the picture can be completed to Luther's advantage.

We have enough of Luther's picture before us to see that hope is not one of its elements.¹⁶ If Palmer's pure love of God entails her hatred and condemnation of herself, then it is inimical to any hope she might have for her salvation. To see that this is so, it is helpful to consider two ways of construing hope, either as a belief or as a desire. Consider first the case in which hope is construed as a desire for one's eternal salvation. In this case, Palmer's pure love of God is in mental conflict with her hope for salvation: the fulfillment of one of the desires is logically incompatible with the fulfillment of the other. Consider, secondly, hope construed as a belief in one's eternal salvation. There is no conflict of desires here, since in this case there is one desire cheek to jowl with one belief. In the abstract, there is nothing logically untoward about the pair of mental states expressed by "S believes that *P*" and "S desires that not-*P*." But Luther can claim, with some plausibility, that there is a tension between Palmer's believing that she will be saved and her desiring that she be damned. He can allege that the belief contaminates the desire, in the sense that the desire is unauthentic or insincere in direct proportion to the strength of the belief.

Whether hope is a desire or a belief, it contaminates (or is contaminated by) pure love. It is not surprising, then, that hope is conspicuous by its absence in Luther's depiction of pure love.¹⁷

¹⁶ It is not accidental that when Richard Swinburne discusses Luther's views about faith, he investigates the possible connection between faith and love without mentioning hope. See Swinburne's *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 110–115.

¹⁷ It is natural to ask what Luther has to say about Romans 8:24: "For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?" According to Luther, "Hope, which arises from a desire for a thing that is loved, always increases the love by delay. Thus it happens that the thing hoped for and the one who hopes become as one through the intensity of the hope. . . . Love transforms the one who loves into what is loved. Thus hope transforms [the one who hopes] into what is hoped for, but what is hoped for does not appear. Thus [hope] transfers [the one who hopes] into the unknown, into the hidden, into interior darkness, so that he knows not what he hopes for, and yet he knows what he does not hope for" (*W* 56:374). I am inclined to say that in making hope consequent on love, Luther thinks of hope as a desire, not a belief. The last sentence in particular echoes what Luther had said about pure love of God in the scholium on Romans 5:5.

III. Admiring Luther's Picture

If Luther is right, then hope has no categorical, essential value for *homo viator*. The friends of hope are thereby obliged to find fault with Luther's picture of pure love. And they had better find fault with the picture, not a caricature. In order to put the picture in the most favorable light, I shall discuss a series of issues; some are responses to anticipated objections, others extend and clarify the picture in various ways.

III.1. Self-Hatred and Self-Concern

Pure love of God entails hatred of oneself. In this respect Luther's conception of pure love differs from the quietistic conception put forward later and most visibly by François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon.¹⁸ According to Fénelon, in the state of pure love, the soul is indifferent to itself, freed entirely from any concern for itself, loving only the will of God and what God wills. An indifferent soul could come to hate itself if God willed that it hate itself, but the antecedent of that conditional is certainly not necessary and may be impossible. Quietistic pure love does not *entail* hatred of oneself. In fact, quietistic pure love, insofar as it aims solely at God's will being done, seems to entail having no attitude or concern directed toward oneself. In this respect also it differs from Luther's pure love. For suppose that Palmer achieves the state of self-hatred required for Luther's pure love. If, as Luther insists, it is genuine hatred, whose object is Palmer herself, then it will be crucially important to her that *she* be the one whom she wants to see in hell. Palmer will be concerned that it be *Palmer* who deservedly suffers, out of love of God. But it will be equally important to Palmer that it be Palmer who suffers out of *her* love of God. So there are two ways at least in which self-concern enters into Luther's conception of pure love.

Since self-hatred as well as self-love entails self-involvement, it is important for Luther that there be a distinction between self-concern or self-involvement on the one hand and self-interest or self-love on the other. Surely there is such a distinction.¹⁹ A person might care not merely that her children be provided for but that *she* be one of the providers, even when her providing for her children entails great personal sacrifice. Using the terminology deployed in discussing the self-exclusiveness thesis, we can say that her desire's *content* is self-involving, its *target* comprises (some of) those to whom she is united by love, and its *cause* or *motive* is not either real or perceived self-interest but rather love.

¹⁸ For an excellent discussion, along with citations of the relevant texts, see Robert Merrihew Adams, "Pure Love," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 8(1980): 83–99; reprinted in his *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 174–192.

¹⁹ I am especially indebted to Adams, "Pure Love," sec. 3, for clarification of this distinction.

Now the very distinction that is important to Luther is also crucial to the Thomistic extension of the self-exclusiveness thesis about hope. My hope that *I* will be saved is both self-interested and self-involving, and for that reason it is easy not to detect the distinction if we concentrate exclusively on this case. The two components come apart, however, in the case of my hope that *you* will be saved. That hope is not self-involving: I could have it even if I believed that I would not be saved. It is nevertheless self-interested if Aquinas is right in saying that when we are united by love, your interests become (a part of) my interests. We should note in passing, then, that since the distinction between self-concern and self-interest is common to both Aquinas's and Luther's views, neither view can consistently fault the other for relying on the distinction.

III.2. Doing and Undoing

You will search the *Lectures on Romans* in vain for a recipe for attaining the state of pure love of God. Luther's depicts an end state, not a process leading to it. Should you have expected a recipe?

Suppose your goal is to become adept at the calculus. You would be well advised to master the concept of a function's having a limit before you tackle the notion of a derivative or the operation of integration. Although the process of learning the calculus is not mechanical, there are sequential stages to it that any would-be learner should follow. Your mastery of the calculus presupposes that you have acquired certain concepts and certain abilities. Because the concepts and abilities form a structural and sequential hierarchy, it is possible to specify a way, or a limited number of ways, in which they can be acquired. The acquisition of many cognitive states and abilities is the result of arduous, sophisticated training of an initially unformed, perhaps resistant mind. The same is true, as Aristotle emphasized, for many states of the will. No one is born courageous; courage must be acquired. Although Aristotle did not say much more about the acquisition of courage than that in situations of fear one must act as the courageous person would act, we could imagine, I suppose, the rise of a class of professional courage trainers. But the problem that Palmer faces is not so much the *acquisition* of a state of will as the *eradication* of such a state; namely, her love of self.

Suppose that, after you have become a calculus aficionado, your doctor tells you that if you want to preserve your health, you must become completely ne-scient about the calculus. You must, that is, unlearn the fundamental concepts and become unable to perform any of the distinctive operations. How would you go about doing that? "Quit doing the stuff, and count on forgetting" is a familiar strategy, but it may be too slow and unreliable for your needs: what we are able to forget is not entirely within our control. (Remember the adage about

learning how to ride a bicycle.) There is hypnosis, behavior modification, and the golden age of neurophysiology. Whatever you may think about the chances for success of these techniques, you can by now see what the problem is. As hard as it was to learn the calculus, it may be just as hard, even harder, to unlearn it. And as desperate as your plight is, you would not fault your doctor for telling you what your goal must be, if you are to preserve your health, even though your doctor cannot offer you a reliable prescription for achieving that goal.

The goal of achieving pure love of God, Luther can plausibly argue, requires undoing what we have been doing all our lives; namely, seeking our own welfare first and subordinating most if not all other projects to that quest. It is not a criticism of Luther that he does not supply a surefire regimen for attaining pure love. But, unlike your doctor, it is not simply that Luther does not think that he *knows* of any such regimen. It is rather that Luther believes that no regimen *can be* surefire. If there really were a malaise routinely brought on by the calculus, we might then expect the rise of a class of expert calculus deprogrammers. There is no natural way, however, by which we may induce pure love in ourselves. The attitudes and actions that are inimical to pure love are so much a part of us, literally constitutive of our *second*, postlapsarian nature, that they are ineradicable by us without the aid of divine grace.

III.3. Counterproducts

Recall the two apparently paradoxical elements of Luther's picture. The first was that by desiring her damnation, Palmer will attain her salvation. The second was that enlightened self-love provides Palmer with the natural motivation to try to eradicate self-love, since absence of self-love will bring Palmer closer to ensuring her salvation, yet the motive thwarts the absence of the desire. By injecting the second apparent paradox into the first, we should get the corollary that if Palmer's desire for her own damnation is motivated by a desire for her salvation, then, although she might be saved, it will not be on account of that motivated desire.

Apparent paradoxes need not be real paradoxes. The first of Luther's claims seems to be an instance of the following thesis:

- (A) One's desire for not-S for oneself will bring about S for oneself.²⁰

²⁰ I assume, for the sake of simplicity, that damnation and salvation are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive alternatives. I also assume that the desire not to be saved is the same desire as the desire to be damned. Luther regards this to be a universally true instance of (A):

One's desire for damnation for oneself will bring about salvation for oneself.

But Luther does not regard this instance of (A) to be universally true:

One's desire for salvation for oneself will bring about damnation for oneself.

Recall that the lowest rank of the predestined elect mentioned in the third scholium to Romans 8:28 are people who want to be saved and who will be saved.

The second claim seems to exemplify this form:

- (B) If the motive behind one's lack of desire for *S* for oneself is a desire for *S* for oneself, then one does desire *S* for oneself.

Thesis (A) is surely not true in general. Your desire not to learn linear algebra is almost certain to result in your not learning linear algebra. Nevertheless, some desires are counterproductive, in direct proportion to the strength of the desire. One cannot fulfill one's desire not to have *any* desires as long as one has *that* desire. If that example has a faint aroma of sophistry, consider the desires to sleep and not to behave in a self-conscious, awkward manner: for as long as, and to the degree to which, those desires are present to one's mind, they will perpetuate the very states they seek to avoid.²¹

To be sure, there are dissimilarities between my desire not to be awkwardly self-conscious and Palmer's desire not to be saved. My desire is easy to come by; Palmer's is hard to cultivate. Both desires are counterproductive, but mine, if allowed to operate directly, results in a negative counterproduct, while Palmer's results in a supremely positive counterproduct. Even so, there is an important similarity between our two desires, and that is that they *are* counterproductive. There is a plausible explanation for why a desire not to behave self-consciously typically results in self-conscious behavior. Insofar as my desire leads me to monitor my own behavior, the behavior comes to lack the spontaneity I want it to have. As we have seen, Luther has an explanation for why Palmer's desire would be counterproductive: she would thereby will what God wills, thus incurring God's love and her salvation. It is not clear that Luther's explanatory mechanism is correct—I discuss that issue later—but we can at least note for now that there are legitimate instances of thesis (A), even if we might not be convinced that Luther's first apparent paradox is one of them.

III.4. By-Products

My wanting to behave in a natural, unaffected way is both stimulus and impediment to my behaving less self-consciously. According to Luther, Palmer's desire for her salvation is both stimulus and impediment to her attaining salvation. What are the two of us to do?

If my actions are to become less self-conscious, they should issue directly from desires other than the desire not to behave self-consciously. (While you

²¹ See Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chap. 2, "States That Are Essentially By-Products," for a suggestive discussion of these phenomena.

learn to stroke the backhand properly in tennis, you need to concentrate on your grip, the position of the racket head, and the way you follow through on your stroke. But you will become adept at the backhand only when you no longer have to concentrate on the correctness of your stroke.) My desire not to behave self-consciously will be satisfied only if, so to speak, it disappears. Nevertheless, the desire can motivate me to try to achieve the desired state in some indirect way. Wishing to become less self-conscious and more spontaneous, I might try imbibing three martinis in an hour. (Seeking to avoid the pain brought about by the dentist's drill, you might try concentrating all your attention on the pain; ironically, so the story goes, the pain ceases to hurt.)²² That regimen is risky: it might purchase diminished self-consciousness at the price of augmented boorishness. But if the regimen is to work at all, it will do so only if it extinguishes, or at least submerges below the level of consciousness, the desire that motivated it. My becoming less self-conscious and more spontaneous is, then, a by-product of other activities I have engaged in, activities that, whatever else they may involve, bring about this by-product only by making my original desire invisible to me.

In what way must my desire not to behave self-consciously become "invisible"? Must it cease to exist, thus playing only an ancestral role in the development of my present desires? If so, then, recalling our earlier discussion of Luther's second apparent paradox and applying it to my desire not to behave self-consciously, we are apt to treat thesis (B) diachronically and interpret the preposition "behind," contained in thesis (B), as a temporal notion:

- (BD) If the motive *that was ancestral* to one's lack of desire for *S* for oneself is a desire for *S* for oneself, then one does desire *S* for oneself.

Or can the desire's "invisibility" be a matter of its being presently in place in my psyche but buried below the conscious level, still somehow interacting with my conscious desires? In this case we will interpret thesis (B) synchronically, glossing the "behind" in more psychoanalytic terms:

- (BP) If the motive presently beneath the conscious level of one's lack of desire for *S* for oneself is a desire for *S* for oneself, then one does desire *S* for oneself.

If thesis (BP) applies to my case, does the unconscious presence of the desire not to behave self-consciously contaminate my conscious desires?

²² See Daniel Dennett, "Why You Can't Make a Computer That Feels Pain," in his *Brainstorms* (Montgomery, VT.: Bradford Books, 1978), pp. 190–229.

From a therapeutic point of view, as long as my behavior is no longer self-conscious, these questions are candidates for the title of philosophical extravagance. Suppose that I no longer consciously desire not to behave self-consciously and, as a result, behave in an unfeigned, unself-conscious way. Then on the first alternative we will say that thesis (BD) is false in my case, since even though my desire not to behave self-consciously was historically a motive behind my present lack of that desire, the desire no longer exists. On the second alternative we can insist that thesis (BP), on its most plausible interpretation, is false in my case. For if the motive behind my present lack of *conscious* desire not to behave self-consciously is the *unconscious* desire not to behave self-consciously, then it does not follow that I *consciously* desire not to behave self-consciously.²³ If generic thesis (B) is false in my case on either alternative reading—(BD) or (BP)—who cares which alternative is correct?²⁴

I should care. Even if my behavior now flows smoothly, I have reason to want to have become the kind of person described by the first alternative rather than the second. I want my behavior to be a product of the desires, intentions, and projects of which I am or can be aware, not a product of them plus an unconscious desire. I want it that way because any unconscious desire I might have, insofar as it is unconscious, is inaccessible to me. I would thus have no way of knowing, on my own, what role the unconscious desire plays in determining my behavior. For all I could know directly, the unconscious desire might be doing all the work, making my conscious states feckless epiphenomena, making me a victim of self-deception.

If I should care, then a fortiori Palmer should care. If, as a by-product of other activities she has engaged in, Palmer does attain at the conscious level the state of not wanting salvation for herself, she should care for reasons analogous to mine whether she still has a desire for salvation operating at the unconscious level. But in addition to the kinds of concern that I have about the unconscious springs of my unself-conscious behavior, Palmer has another, big, concern. Her unconscious desires are inaccessible to her but not to God, the *inspector cordis et renum*. Thesis (BP) seemed not to be true of my case, but only so long as we focused attention exclusively on my conscious desires and observable behavior. Palmer should consider the applicability of thesis (BP) to her case when it is not only behavior that is being judged by an omniscient being but also the state of her soul.

Suppose first that Palmer still has a desire for her salvation submerged and operating at the unconscious level. Then God will know this fact about her. It

²³ It does follow that I unconsciously desire not to behave self-consciously. That makes thesis (BP) true but trivial.

²⁴ Notice that the argument in this paragraph helps itself to the optimistic but dubious assumption that my unconscious desire has no deleterious effect on my behavior.

is plausible to say in this case that thesis (BP), interpreted in the following way, applies to Palmer:

(BPP) If the motive presently beneath the conscious level of Palmer's lack of desire for salvation for herself is an unconscious desire for salvation for herself, then, all things considered, Palmer still desires salvation for herself.

"All things considered," because it is the unconscious desire that is in the driver's seat.²⁵ That is enough for God to conclude that Palmer has not achieved the state of pure love. And that is enough for Palmer to conclude that her salvation is not guaranteed by the mechanism Luther claims to discern behind thesis (A). It is fair enough, then, for Luther to conclude that thesis (BP) applies to Palmer's case on the hypothesis that she presently has an unconscious desire for her salvation.

Consider now the case in which these statements are true: Palmer once had a desire for salvation; that desire led her to take steps to eliminate the desire; she has in fact eliminated the desire, both from her conscious and unconscious psyche; and moreover, she has come to desire her own damnation. There is no doubt that Palmer has become the person she wanted to become, and it is clear that thesis (BP) does not characterize her case. But does thesis (BD)? What will omniscient God think of Palmer now?

III.5. Hoodwinking God

We know what Luther's answer is: because Palmer's will conforms to God's will, God will love her and she will be saved. Some may be hankering to protest Luther's confidence in that mechanism. They might be forgiven for thinking that Luther's claim smacks of presumption; it reveals an overweening attitude about Luther's capacity to know the mind of God. They might unflatteringly describe the mechanism itself as depicting God as overly complaisant and indulgent, too eager to overlook the calculating, self-serving way in which Palmer got to be as she now is. This objection is a member of the same family identified and endorsed by Jon Elster:

Christianity rests on the idea that there is one spectator clever enough to see through any actor, viz. God. Hence Pascal's wager argument

²⁵ It might be that Palmer still has an unconscious desire for her salvation but that it is so vestigial that it does little or no work. In that case I suppose that thesis (BPP) would not be true of her situation.

must take account of the need to induce a real belief, since faking will not do. Moreover, the fact of God's clairvoyance explains why good works cannot bring about salvation if performed for the sake of salvation. The state of grace is essentially (or at most) a by-product of action. Let me record an objection to the wager argument. What kind of God is it that would be taken in by a genuine belief with a suspect past history—i.e. belief ultimately caused, even if not proximately justified, by instrumental rationality? Pascal's own attack in *Les Provinciales* on Jesuit casuistry shows that he is open to this objection. Here he argues against the Jesuit doctrine of *directing the intention*, i.e. the idea that an action which is blameable when performed on one intention may not be so if performed on another, so that the confessor should direct his attention to the intention behind the behaviour rather than to the behaviour itself. The obvious objection is that even if . . . one were to succeed in changing the intention, the blameable intention behind the change of intention would contaminate the action that was performed on the new intention. Yet a similar argument would seem to apply to the reasoning behind the wager: how could present belief not be contaminated by the mundane causal origin?²⁶

If Elster's objection is allowed to stand, then Palmer's shield of pure love has a bar sinister: the desire for her own salvation was an ancestor. Surely, however, the requirement of causal purity implied by Elster's objection is implausibly strong. Suppose that Chumley knows and regrets that Sly has deeply racist attitudes. Sly, shrewd enough to see that the expression of these attitudes will result in disfavor from his corporate employer, Boss, keeps the attitudes to himself. While on the job, Sly acts in ways calculated to impress upon Boss Sly's commitment to racial equality. Influenced by Sly's overt actions, Boss gives Sly assignments working with minority employees. With the passage of time, Chumley comes to notice that Sly no longer gives vent to his old attitudes in private situations in which he could "get away" with it. Instead, Sly speaks approvingly of the cooperation he has received from his coworkers and the success that the corporation has thereby had. One day Chumley finds Sly angrily denouncing a mutual friend's racism. Chumley finally and correctly concludes that Sly's on-the-job dissimulation has indirectly made Sly become what he at first only pretended to be.

Chumley surely would need a heart of stone not to approve of Sly's conversion, even though it had such a shady beginning. Chumley is not "taken in" by a genuine attitude "with a suspect past history." It is rather that Chumley takes

²⁶ Elster, *Sour Grapes*, pp. 74–75.

the past attitude, the present person, and the contribution of the former to the latter as an occasion for forgiving and rejoicing. Despite his presumptuous tone, Luther is right to suppose that Christianity rests on the idea of a *loving and merciful* clever spectator. Palmer cannot expect to hoodwink an omniscient God, nor is it any part of Luther's view that Palmer can somehow morally oblige God to grant her salvation. Luther is nevertheless within his rights to reject the imputation of fault along the lines suggested by thesis (BD). If Palmer were to bring herself to a state of perfect love from a state of imperfect love, she would have done all that any human can do.

III.6. Oughts and Cans

Or is it that Palmer would have done *more* than any human can do? One may wonder whether it is psychologically possible for persons to achieve the state of self-hatred that Luther commends. To hate oneself, in Luther's sense, entails consciously wanting the worst for oneself. It is not clear that one really can have that desire, even if one thinks that one *deserves* the worst. Let us make the case as dire as we can for Luther. Suppose that people genuinely cannot come to hate themselves. Suppose further that when Luther wrote the *Lectures on Romans* he believed that they cannot. What follows from these two suppositions?

Less than might meet the eye. If Luther's picture is to be faulted on this score, the criticism would presumably take one or the other of the following two forms: Luther is exhorting us to do something we cannot do. Luther is exhorting us to do something that he believes we cannot do.

The first criticism rests on the principle that what is obligatory (or superegregatory) for one must be something that is within one's power. Luther is no friend of that principle. In his summary of the detailed discussion of Romans 4:7 he writes that we cannot fulfill the law of God, that we are therefore *deservedly* unrighteous, and as a result, that we must always pray for the remission—or at least the nonimputation—of our sins (see *W* 56:268–91). Or consider the plight of Luther's damned who are no longer able to acquiesce in God's will: it need not follow that they no longer ought so to acquiesce. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther says that the Decalogue commandment against covetousness makes sinners of us all.²⁷ Luther's doctrine of justification by faith, not works, depends on the fact that we cannot do the works bid by this and the other commandments, even though we ought to. These counterexamples to the principle that what is obligatory must be within the agent's power exhibit a

²⁷ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31: 333–377, esp. p. 348.

common structure. In each case the agent is unable to do something obligatory because the agent is in a debilitated state. There are similar plausible counterexamples that arise in nontheological contexts. The driver should have avoided hitting the pedestrian but was unable to because the driver was drunk. The lifeguard should have saved the drowning victim but could not: the task was not too difficult, but the lifeguard was out of shape. One might protest that in the latter cases the agent is responsible for the debilitating condition; that condition was voluntarily acquired, not inherited. Luther surely does think that we are accountable in spite of our inherited tendency toward sin. Does he thus set the standards absurdly high?

In his discussion of Romans 7:14–25, Luther appeals to a distinction between “to do” (*facere*) and “to accomplish” or “to fulfill” (*perficere*) (W 56:340–54, esp. pp. 342, 353–54). The feature of the distinction relevant to our discussion is this: we can *do* the good but we cannot *fulfill* the good. To do the good is not to succumb to the sinful promptings that we find within us. To fulfill the good would be not to have the sinful promptings at all and that is not within our power. Suppose that molecular geneticists were to discover that racist attitudes in human populations are the expression of an identifiable genetic heritage. Suppose further that Blowhard and Diehard are identical twins possessing these genes but raised separately. Blowhard has become a vicious, unabashed hatemonger. From time to time in his life, Diehard has found inexplicable feelings of racial prejudice welling up within him, but because he has been taught that prejudice is wrong, he has striven not to express them in action, verbal or otherwise, and he has developed a set of techniques that he uses to derail and dissipate those attitudes whenever he becomes aware of them. Diehard does the good but does not fulfill the good; Blowhard does not even do the good. Surely Blowhard deserves censure and Diehard deserves moral credit even though they both have the same, involuntarily inherited, debilitating condition. Diehard ought not to have the feelings he disavows, but in order for that to happen he would have to become (perhaps literally!) a new person.

Let us reexamine Palmer’s case from Luther’s standpoint. Because of the heritage conferred on her by original sin, she is the subject of all sorts of unbidden, sinful desires. Even if she can avoid acting on those desires—and that is no mean feat—she cannot avoid having the desires. She can do the good, but she cannot fulfill the good. The fact that she is subject to sinful desires might motivate her to hate herself. But now we return to the question whether she *can* come to hate herself. If she cannot, then it is open to Luther to say that her inability is also a product of her sinful inheritance and that, nevertheless, self-hatred is either obligatory or a supererogatory ideal.

Is it not perverse or deceitful of Luther to commend to Palmer a goal that he believes she cannot achieve? Not necessarily. Suppose that Chumley is involved in the moral education of Diehard. Believing that Diehard cannot avoid having racist attitudes, Chumley might nevertheless commend to him a life in which he does not have them, let alone act on them. Chumley might think, with some justification, that this is the best way to get Diehard to disown the attitudes, to regard them as somehow alien, as not genuinely *his*.²⁸ In similar fashion, even if Palmer cannot achieve self-hatred, her taking Luther seriously may be the best way for her to renounce the self-interested desires she may inescapably have. Moreover, if Luther's belief is false, if Palmer really can achieve self-hatred, her achieving it may come about by her initially trying to hate herself, seeing that her efforts have failed, and then genuinely coming to hate herself as a reaction of self-disgust to the failure of her initial efforts.

IV. Why I Am Not a Lutheran

In arguing earlier that Luther's picture of pure love of God leaves no room for hope, I did not mean to suggest that Luther consciously set out to abolish hope. Luther may have thought that if pure love is a Christian ideal that has no use for hope, it might still be that hope is an essential component of the ordinary, nonsupererogatory, Christian life. Here the issues quickly become vexed, for it is natural to protest that although the supererogatory goes beyond the obligatory, it cannot nullify it. I propose not to enter that debate. I wish instead to reject Luther's assumption that pure love is a commendable ideal and to reinstate hope's credentials. The two projects are not wholly independent.

Let us return to Palmer's case. Suppose that out of devotion to God, she yearns to achieve the self-hatred required for Luther's conception of pure love, but she still finds within herself a stubborn core of self-love. Suppose further that Dr. Wheedle has developed a drug that induces the requisite state of self-hatred. In supposing this, we need not suppose that Wheedle's drug would work on the village atheist. For it is plausible to assume that the right kind of self-hatred entails a suite of cognitive states, such as belief that God exists, that he rightly judges us and finds us wanting, and the like. But Palmer, unlike the village atheist, already has or is receptive to the relevant cognitive states. Perhaps then all that Wheedle's drug has to do for Palmer is create in her a mood of self-loathing that will interact with her cognitive states: the mood will strengthen

²⁸ On the notion of a desire's not being one's own, see Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 239–251.

some of the beliefs, and the beliefs in turn will make the mood seem appropriate. Should Palmer take Wheedle's drug, thus sidestepping all the elaborate and chancy indirect methods that she might otherwise attempt?

Before you answer that question, consider one more fanciful example. Recall Diehard, our congenital but reluctant racist. Let us imagine that Dr. Helix has perfected gene therapy to such a degree that a simple procedure could eliminate Diehard's innate racist attitudes with no undesirable side effects. (To make the case closer to the situation with Wheedle's drug, we might even suppose that Helix's procedure would not work to eliminate the entrenched racist attitudes of Blowhard, our village bigot.) Is it permissible for Diehard to undergo Helix's procedure?

I trust that the answer is Yes; what could be wrong with one's voluntarily eliminating an involuntarily contracted affliction? Although we could understand why Diehard might not choose to undergo the procedure if he has achieved mastery over his unbidden attitudes by indirect means, there surely would be nothing morally wrong in his undergoing the procedure.

If it is permissible for Diehard to undergo Helix's procedure, should it not also be permissible for Palmer to take Wheedle's drug?

I think that the answer is No. I also think that it is important that we say No for the right reason. Some might be tempted to seek a relevant lack of parallel between Diehard's situation and Palmer's in the fact that salvation from God is involved in the latter but not the former. The claim might be that omniscient God would know about and disapprove of Palmer's instant attainment of pure love. Now the claim is not obvious: an omniscient and loving God would also know all about Palmer's intentions and motives, along with the differences between Palmer and the village atheist, and judge accordingly.²⁹ Moreover, an admirer of Luther's picture ought to be especially wary of making the claim. For the defense of Luther's picture against Elster's condition of causal purity depended on rejecting the wholesale applicability of that kind of claim. Thus an admirer of Luther's picture who wants to maintain the permissibility of Palmer's taking indirect steps to achieve self-hatred while denying the permissibility of her taking the drug must point to some convincing difference between the two methods that does not presume to know God's judgments.

No doubt more could be said on behalf of this kind of negative answer to the question of the permissibility of Palmer's taking the drug. My negative answer, however, depends on a different reason. Palmer should not take the drug because

²⁹ If *X* desires your love and you take a pill that deepens your already existing love for *X* by removing impediments to it, it is not clear that *X* is entitled to complain. If, however, *X* desires *Y*'s love and *Y* is indifferent at best to *X* but cynically takes the pill in order to have a better chance of inheriting *X*'s estate, then *X* is entitled to complain.

the state it would induce, unlike the state Helix's procedure would induce in Diehard, is bad. Since the state is bad, any attempt—direct or indirect—to induce it is misguided. Helix's procedure eliminates a vicious factor from Diehard's psyche. It thus enables Diehard more easily to exercise his ability to treat others in a fair-minded way. Helix's procedure does not produce a virtue in Diehard, but it allows one of Diehard's fledgling virtues to flourish. In contrast, the self-hatred central to Luther's conception of pure love stifles the growth of other virtues; first, the virtue of hope and then, as a consequence, the virtue of charity. These claims presuppose that hope and charity are virtues and that without hope there can be no charity. In arguing for the plausibility of these claims, I shall rely heavily on the insights of Aquinas.

Aquinas takes Paul's enumeration of faith, hope, and charity to specify three theological virtues. They are *virtues* because they are operative habits, habits governing one's actions that perfect those actions toward an end. Faith, hope, and charity are *theological* virtues because the end at which they aim, namely, eternal beatitude, is beyond the capacity of humans to attain qua natural creatures: their object is God, they are infused³⁰ by God, and knowledge of them depends on divine revelation (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 62, a. 1). They are *three* virtues because they perform three distinct functions. Faith perfects the operation of the intellect by supplying it with principles beyond its natural capacities, hope heartens the operation of the will by setting beatitude before it as something that can be attained with divine assistance, and charity perfects the operation of the will by conforming its ends with God's, thus uniting it with God (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 62, a. 3; see also *ST*, IIaIIae, q. 17, a. 6).

It may help to see that hope is a genuine virtue, not merely an example of wishful thinking, by contrasting it to *despair* and *presumption*. Unlike the moral virtues, the theological virtues are not means between extremes of deficiency and excess. It is impossible to believe too strongly in God, to trust too much in God's omnipotence and mercy, or to love God too much (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 64, a. 4). In particular, hope is not a mean between despair and presumption (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 64, a. 4, ad 3; *ST*, IIaIIae, q. 17, a. 5, ad 2). Despair is not a state of hoping too little, and presumption is not hoping too much. On the contrary, despair is the abandonment of hope, a kind of turning away from God that results when salvation is deemed to be beyond the reach of the sinful creature (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 40, a. 4; *ST*, IIaIIae, q. 20, a. 1).³¹ And presumption is a rejection

³⁰ *Infunduntur*, a term of art. The process of infusion contrasts with the process of the acquisition of the moral virtues by habituation. The latter is typically within our unaided power; the former is not.

³¹ For some suggestive remarks on the phenomenology of despair, see Josef Pieper, *On Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 47–61.

of hope as unnecessary, either because one presumes that salvation is within one's own power or because one presumes that God's mercy will save even those who are unrepentant (*ST*, IIaIIae, q. 21, a. 1). Both despair and presumption are sinful states. Because they consist in the rejection of a virtue necessary for salvation offered by the Holy Spirit, Aquinas reckons them as sins against the Holy Spirit (*ST*, IIaIIae, q. 14, a. 2). Among the consequences of this rejection is a proneness to malice, or sinning for the sheer pleasure of sinning (*ST*, IIaIIae, q. 14, a. 1). Despair, according to Aquinas, is the more serious of the two, since it is a more serious error to mistrust God by supposing that he will exact punishment even from repentant sinners than to suppose that he will mercifully spare the unrepentant (*ST*, IIaIIae, q. 21, a. 2).

I argued earlier that the self-hatred that is central to Luther's pure love is psychologically incompatible with hope. To hold both, a person would have to desire earnestly that God's justice be fully prosecuted while at the same time trusting steadfastly that God's justice will not be prosecuted. If hope is a virtue necessary for salvation, then Luther's pure love puts its practitioner in peril, not because of the way it has been brought about, but because of what it is.

If Luther's picture of pure love entailed only the loss of hope, that would be reason enough to reject the picture. But it also entails the loss of charity. In order to see this, we need further to explore Aquinas's views. In particular, we need to see what charity is, that charity cannot exist without hope, and that Luther's pure love is not charity.

Aquinas takes the order given in the Pauline list to be an order of precedence. Citing an interlinear gloss on Matthew 1:2, Aquinas does not demur from saying that just as Abraham begot Isaac and Isaac begot Jacob, so faith begets hope and hope begets charity (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 40, a. 7; see also *ST*, IIaIIae, q. 17, aa. 7–8). I believe that the notion of precedence here provides for some tricky exposition. Whatever account we give of it must pay heed to the following claims made by Aquinas. (1) The theological virtues are infused simultaneously (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 62, a. 4). I take this claim to imply that whenever faith is infused, so are hope and charity. I do not take it to imply that faith, hope, and charity are infused only once in a person's career. (2) Despite what has just been said under claim (1), faith and hope can exist without charity (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 65, a. 4). (3) Nevertheless, charity cannot exist without faith and hope (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 65, a. 5). (4) Despite claim (3), the blessed in heaven retain charity (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 67, a. 6; *ST*, IIaIIae, q. 26, a. 13) even though their faith and hope have been "voided" (*evacuatur*) (*ST*, IIaIIae, q. 18, a. 2; *ST*, IaIIae, q. 67, aa. 3–5).

Let us first look briefly at claims (1) and (2), then at claim (4), reserving a more detailed examination for claim (3). Even if faith, hope, and charity are infused simultaneously, it does not follow that an agent realizes them

simultaneously. Suppose that Martians have simultaneously instilled in me true beliefs about the correct fingering for the *Waldstein* Sonata, the hopeful desire that I might achieve the mastery to play the sonata, and the loving desire to play it as it ought to be played. The latter desire might become both less dispositional and more determinate only as I mobilize my beliefs and hope.³² In similar fashion, one can believe in God and hope for salvation but not yet will as one ought. To will not only *what* one ought but *as* one ought is to be perfected by charity. As for claim (4), the charity enjoyed by the blessed in heaven no longer depends on faith, for faith has been superseded by something epistemically superior: direct vision of God. And hope is made otiose because the blessed possess that for which they had hoped.

Claim (3), then, is a claim about the precedence of the theological virtues as they are lodged in *homo viator*. The notion of precedence is reasonably clear in the case of faith and hope. Faith precedes hope because hope in the will presupposes some act or state of faith in the intellect: those who assent to no beliefs whatsoever about some of the propositions expressing the content of faith literally cannot have any hope *for salvation* (ST, IaIIae, q. 62, a. 4; ST, IIaIIae, q. 17, a. 7). One would expect, then, if hope precedes charity, that charity in the will presupposes some act or state of hope in the will. One would expect further that those who have no hope for their salvation cannot have charity, construed as love of God for his own sake and love of others (ST, IIaIIae, q. 17, a. 8; q. 25, a. 1).

Charity is *amicitia* between God and person. Since *amicitia* has implications that go beyond those associated with the term “friendship,” I leave it untranslated. *Amicitia* goes beyond *amor concupiscentiae* because it entails benevolence or goodwill toward one’s friend for the friend’s sake. But even benevolent love is not enough. As Aquinas puts it, *amicus est amico amicus*: a friend is a friend to a friend (ST, IIaIIae, q. 23, a. 1). An anonymous stranger might lovingly bestow the bulk of his estate on you; for all of that, the two of you are not friends. For that matter, if Philemon secretly and benevolently loves Amanda and vice versa, Philemon and Amanda are still not friends. As Aquinas would put it, their love is not yet communicated or shared. Communication is a dynamic process involving both cognitive and volitional components. Philemon must know that Amanda loves him; Philemon must know that Amanda knows that he loves her; and so forth. Moreover, the knowledge must shape the desires and interests that each has.

Given Aquinas’s characterization of charity as an ongoing, dynamic *amicitia* between a person and God, it may not be immediately clear why charity

³² My beliefs and hope, in turn, may be deepened by my developing desire. In ST, IaIIae, q. 65, a. 4, Aquinas claims that charity transforms faith and hope from inchoate to perfected states.

should count as a virtue of the person. Two observations may help. First, one who loves God with the love of charity takes on God's interests and projects as one's own. That is no mean feat, since it entails that one tame or extinguish those aspects of one's will that are at variance with God's desires for us. Charity thus is demanding; it requires disciplined vigilance over oneself. Second, it must be admitted that there is a way in which charity is unlike faith and hope. Faith and hope are *internally specifiable* virtues of a person. Since faith is a kind of belief and hope a species of desire, an omniscient being could tell whether a person had the two of them solely by knowing the states of the person's soul. But an omniscient being could not tell whether the person had charity on that basis alone, any more than one could tell whether another person had a sibling solely by attending to the other persons's beliefs and desires. To have charity is to *be*, not merely to be *disposed* to be, in a certain relationship with God. But other virtues appear to have this feature of external specification built into them. Consider, on analogy, the virtue of filial respect, or respect for one's parents. It is plausible to think that filial respect requires that one be actually, not just dispositionally, in a certain relationship with one's parents. If this is so, then there is no reason to think that charity is not a virtue.

We are now in a position to see why charity, understood as *amicitia* between a person and God, presupposes hope. I cannot enter into a relationship of *amicitia* with you as long as I despair of the possibility, deeming myself unworthy of obtaining the good that the relationship would bestow (*ST*, IaIIae, q. 65, a. 5). Nor can I be bound to you by the ties of *amicitia* if I presume that the good to be obtained thereby is something that I could achieve on my own, without you. In both cases something results that is a counterfeit of *amicitia*. In the latter case I regard you with condescension if not contempt, judging you as quite literally dispensable. In the former case, my despair is compatible with my loving you, but my love is surely not *amicitia*: it is more akin to a pathological idolization, which, if unrequited, is in danger of turning into resentment. I cannot enter into *amicitia* with you, then, unless I trust that you will not spurn me as hateful and unless I deem the good to be obtained as distinctive, a good for which you are essential and irreplaceable. In sum, I cannot enter into *amicitia* with you without hope.

Although charity is *amicitia* between a person and God, Aquinas claims that once one has charity, one can extend it toward other people. Charity toward others goes beyond benevolent love for them: it is love for them mediated by one's *amicitia* with God; one loves the goodness of others because it has been bestowed on them by a loving God whom one loves (*ST*, IIaIIae, q. 25, a. 1). If one has Luther's pure love, however, it is hard to see how one could have even benevolent love—let alone charity—toward others. In commenting on Paul's claim that "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10), Luther

distinguishes two ways of understanding the commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The commandment might mean that we should love our neighbor *and* ourselves. But on a better interpretation of the commandment, we should love *only* our neighbor, modeling that love on our unconditional but improper love of self (*W* 56:482). Luther apparently thinks, then, that I could have pure love of God, which entails self-hatred, while at the same time loving my neighbor. But there are two objections to this. If to love a person is to take some, at least, of that person’s interests as one’s own, I cannot coherently love my neighbor without seeking to advance some interests as mine, even if they all derive from my neighbor’s interests. That is, I cannot consistently consign myself to damnation and think that I should advance some of my interests, namely, the furtherance of your interests. And if I am still capable of making any inferences while in the state of pure love, I should be able to see that my neighbor’s case stands or falls as mine does. For if I desire my damnation because of my sinful nature, then, since my neighbor is like me in being a sinner, I ought to desire my neighbor’s damnation.

If Aquinas’s views on hope and charity are correct even in general outline, they show that Luther’s pure love is incompatible with hope for oneself, charity toward God, and charity toward others. Aquinas’s views also make a case, not only for the legitimacy of hope, but also for the indispensability of hope for the possession of charity. Luther’s pure love, insofar as it is inimical to hope, is thus hopeless in two senses. I am mindful that in pitting Aquinas against Luther, I may appear to be reliving the Counter-Reformation. Since I am not a Catholic, I prefer to give another characterization of the philosophical balance sheet I have drawn here: truth is where you find it.³³

³³ An earlier version of this chapter received the critical scrutiny of David Christensen and Eleonore Stump, whose efforts are deeply appreciated.

INDEX

- a priori knowledge, 28, 35, 87–8, 90, 132
- Abelard, Peter, 315
- ability principle, 288–90
- Abraham, 1, 69, 231, 234, 272n3, 273–4
- accidental change, 62, 67
- accidental properties, inapplicable to God, 21,
 - 37–8, 46, 47, 61–8, 71, 111–2, 117, 123, 126
- accidents with degrees, 65–7
- inseparable accidents, 63–5
- separable accidents, 62–3
- accordion effect, 141n43
- Adams, Robert Merrihew, 145, 256
 - on divine commands, 166, 234–6
 - on grace, 17, 241, 262
- platonism and love, 240–1, 243, 255n14, 267,
 - 346nn18–19
- affiliation, 321–2
- agapē*, 238, 245–8
- agent causation, 174
- agent-centeredness, 243, 261, 263
- agents. *See* external senses, internal senses
- agglomeration principle, 286, 288
- alienation, 261
- Alston, William, 74n1, 333n19
- American Law Institute, 310–11
- amicitia*, 330–3, 360–1. *See also* charity
- amor concupiscentiae*, 341–2, 360
- angels, 39, 125, 130, 135, 209, 338
- annihilation, 98–100, 130, 325
- Anselm, 5, 22–5, 44, 95, 131–3, 209
- antecedent intentions, 235–6
- antecedent will, 233–6
- aptness problem, 237–8, 241
- Aquinas, Thomas, 1, 95, 218, 233–4, 255n14,
 - 289, 337, 347
- on God's hiddenness, 127–33, 142
- on God's knowledge, 73, 75–6, 77n9, 78–80,
 - 83–5, 90–1, 148–9, 218–9
- on God's love, 138
 - on God's omnipresence, 122–7, 129
 - on God's simplicity, 20, 24–32, 35–6, 38–9,
 - 40n30, 42, 46, 49, 90–1, 110–1, 122–3,
 - 127, 137, 218–9
 - on hope, 338–40, 341n9, 347, 358–62
 - on moral dilemmas, 270, 274, 276–85
 - on natural human cognition, 131–3, 134, 136,
 - 142, 148–9, 218–9
 - on piety, 329–30
 - on theological virtues, 358–62
- arationalism, 253–5
- Aristotle, 45, 57, 67–8, 124, 129, 132n27, 237, 347
 - Categories*, 32, 62, 65–6, 79, 80n12, 125
 - Nicomachean Ethics*, 244, 267
 - Topics*, 57–60, 62
- aseity, 23, 26, 36, 42, 75, 76, 78, 92n23, 95–6,
 - 105–6, 107–17
- Atlas, 99–100
- Augustine, 1, 95, 98, 113, 121n6, 130, 139, 315,
 - 341
- on accidental properties, 61–8
- on God's immutability, 44n1, 57–8
- on God's simplicity, 20–2, 69–72
- on hope, 337–9
- Augustinian strategy, 105–7, 148–52
- Austin, J. L., 128, 332–3
- Avicenna, 199, 221

- Baker, Lynne Rudder, 129n19
- Beatrice, 252n3
- begetting, 138–41, 359
- benefit as opposed to harm, 81, 325–7
- benevolence, 6–7, 12, 16–9, 237, 242–3, 246,
 - 360–1
- best possible world, 2, 18, 114, 116, 150, 207–9,
 - 212–3, 217, 256–8, 262
- better-than relation, 206
 - semantic properties, 206
 - substantive conditions, 206, 207, 211, 213–8

- biconditional sentences, 155–8, 184, 189, 272
- Biel, Gabriel, 342n10
- Boethius, 47, 50, 91, 113, 130n23
- bounty, 245
- bringing about vs. allowing to happen, 192
- Broad, C. D., 5–7
- Bruno-improvement, 15–8
- Buridan's Ass, 176, 211
- by-products, 349–52

- calibration, 264
- Cahn, Steven M., vii
- Canute, 160–1
- Cargile, James, 10
- Carson, Thomas L., 300–2
- Cartesian principle, 146–8, 150, 152, 164, 182
- Cartesian voluntarism, 203–4, 218
- Categorical Imperative, 215, 297
- categories, 32, 62, 65, 79, 125, 128, 137
- causal origins of psychological states, 350–4
- causal principles, 132
- causal responsibility vs. moral accountability, 192
- causal theory of knowledge, 77
- chain vs. pyramid, 205–7, 211–2, 214, 216
- character problem, 237–8, 241
- charity, 329, 336–7, 358–62
- children of God, 168, 341
- Christensen, David, vii
- Clarke, Samuel, 211
- coextensive properties, 32–6, 39, 42–3, 46, 60, 323
- cognitive states, 347, 356
- Cohen, S. Marc, 322–3
- comparability, 207, 214, 216–7
- compatibilism, 172–3
- compulsion, external and internal, 115, 198, 266
- Comte-Sponville, André, 237, 238
- concept empiricism, 132, 142
- Condemnation of 1277, 190n25, 197–9, 218
- connectivity, 206, 207, 214n34
- consequent will, 233–4, 236
- consequentialism, 227, 310, 311
- conservation as continuous creation, 1, 98–103, 107, 113, 325
- constructivism, 164
- contact model of causation, 124
- contemporaneous dependency, 108, 117
- contentful dependency, 109
- contingent truth, 103, 105, 146, 157, 162, 220
- coterminous presence, 63
- counterfactual comparisons, 201n9
- counterfactual conditionals, 74, 303n7, 343
- counterfactual variations, 263
- counterproducts, 348–9
- courage, 165, 318, 321, 347
- craft analogy, 320–1
- crafting, 262–3
- creating, 96–8, 102, 103, 114–5, 129, 139, 149, 196, 201, 256, 258–9, 261, 263–4, 266, 325, 328
- creation ex nihilo, 1, 98–100, 107, 129, 263n25, 324
- Cuneo, Terence, vii
- Curley, Edwin M., 104, 146, 159n1

- Dante Alighieri, 252n3
- de dicto* knowledge, 88–9
- de re* knowledge, 88–9
- death penalty, 309–10
- decisiveness, 171–3, 178, 185–8, 232
- deductive inferences, 75, 111
- Definitional Ideal, 322–4, 334
- degreed description, 64–6
- deism, 99
- deity-instance identities, 24, 28, 36
- Dennett, Daniel, 47, 350n22
- dense continua, 210–1
- deontic logic, 272
- Descartes, René, 1, 92, 199
 - on necessary truths, 104–5, 146, 159n1
 - on rational equipoise, 176–7
 - on theological voluntarism, 203–4
- descriptive phrase, 5, 27, 64, 66, 87, 131–3, 136
- desires, first- and second-order, 48, 115, 173, 180, 255, 266, 341
- despair, 358–9, 361
- determinism, 75, 99, 103, 171–3, 175
- diachronic psychological states, 345, 350
- dialectics, 57
- Dionysian Principle, 139, 142, 254n11, 328
- divine activity, 92, 95, 99, 102, 107, 141, 162, 181, 219
- divine attributes. *See* God
- divine command theory, 199, 201, 231–2, 234, 235, 240, 273, 274, 316
- divine commands, 232, 234, 297
- divine ideas, 105
- divine providence, 245, 254, 270, 276n5
- divine will theory, 232, 234–6, 249
- Doctrine of Double Effect, 307–9, 315n16
- doing the good vs. fulfilling the good, 355
- Dominican Order, 133–4, 138
- Donagan, Alan, 276, 284–5
- Donnellan, Keith, 73, 77n8
- Du Four, Vital, 199–202, 203, 221–2
- Duns Scotus, John, 199, 342n10

- Eckhart, Meister, 1, 133–42
- Edwards, Jonathan, 244–5
- Elster, Jon, 349n21, 352–3, 357
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 220
- encapsulation, modular, 109–10
- Endo, Shusako, 270n1
- entailment, 51, 59, 145

- Epicureans, 119
- epistemic necessity, 104
- eros*, 238, 239–41, 244, 245–6, 249
- eternal truths, 105, 205
- Eucharist, sacrament of, 278n9, 280–2
- Euthyphro*, 153, 227, 316–335
 - Definitional Ideal, 322–4, 334
 - Euthyphro's Concession, 322, 333–4
 - Euthyphro's dilemma, 2, 153–4, 161, 227, 230–1, 316, 319–20
- event causation, 173–4
- excellence, 240–1, 252n4, 262, 267
- excuse vs. justification, 193
- experiential memory, 109
- explanatory asymmetry, 71–2, 151, 159
- external senses, 131, 134

- fact-ontologies, 97
- failed attempt discount index, 310
- failed attempts, 309–12
- faith, 80n12, 269, 294, 336–8, 345n16, 354, 358–61
- feasibility problem, 236–8
- Feinberg, Joel, 141n43
- felony murder laws, 303–4, 306
- Fénelon, Françoise de Salignac de la Mothe, 346
- Fermat's Conjecture, 131
- filial piety, 327, 329
- fine-tuning, 103
- folk psychology, 259
- foreknowledge, 52, 83, 91, 103, 205
- foreseeability, 298, 306n10, 307–9
- forgiveness, 247, 293–4
- Franciscans, fourteenth-century, 197, 199, 204, 214
- Frankfurt, Harry, 356
 - on Descartes, 146, 159n1
 - on freedom of will, 255, 266
 - On God's love, 254–6, 258–60, 264, 266
 - on love, 252nn2&4
- Freddoso, Alfred J., vii, 171n3, 204
- freedom
 - conceptions of. *See* liberty of indifference, liberty of rational optimality, liberty of spontaneity
 - of action, 255
 - of will, 203, 255
 - in God, what to create, 2, 17, 114–5, 170, 196–222
 - in God, whether to create, 2, 17, 114–5, 170, 196–222
 - and responsibility, 101
- friendship, 13, 61, 244–6, 252, 267, 360
- Furtherance of Deception Principle, 301–2

- Garcia, J. L. A., 290–3
- Geach, P. T., 10, 15n15, 27n9, 274

- generation and corruption, 98–9, 130
- generic description, 64
- goal-directed activity, 263
- God
 - being itself, 125, 127, 128
 - creator, 1, 96, 98, 115, 170, 194, 241, 261, 273, 324, 328–9
 - eternal, 29, 45n5, 47–52, 67, 71, 91, 105, 112, 113–4, 130, 131n25, 135, 141–2, 234, 253, 259, 334n20
 - existing *a se*. *See* aseity
 - first efficient cause, 93, 123
 - firstmost and essential actor, 123–4, 127
 - goodness itself, 24n8, 139, 152, 154–5, 254n11, 260
 - hidden, 127–31, 142
 - immutable, 1, 5n1, 18, 21, 44–5, 47–51, 57, 59–61, 67–72, 221
 - impeccable, 5n1, 83, 133, 193
 - infallible, 158, 162, 314
 - infinite, 29, 132, 199, 207n15, 242, 244–5, 254, 262, 266, 294
 - just, 7n3, 17, 22–3, 25, 133, 195, 202, 204–5, 219, 235, 290, 314, 359
 - loving, 2, 36, 71, 128, 153, 167, 170, 181, 194, 196, 254–5, 258, 259–60, 266, 273, 316, 330, 334–5, 354, 357, 361
 - merciful, 7n3, 25, 42, 293–4, 314, 354, 358–9
 - necessary being, 29, 62
 - omnibenevolent, 16–9, 42
 - omnipotent, 1, 5n1, 7, 10–2, 17–9, 30, 31–2, 35, 38, 39–42, 44, 46, 66–7, 71, 82, 102, 104–5, 107, 115, 116, 146–8, 151–2, 159, 180–2, 185, 186n21, 190n25, 195, 198, 203, 213, 232, 234, 237, 240, 244, 251, 261–2, 265–6, 273, 275, 291, 325–7, 328, 358
 - omnipresent, 1, 76, 119–27, 130–1, 140
 - omniscient, 1, 5n1, 7, 8–10, 17–9, 26, 30–2, 35–42, 46–7, 51–2, 67, 71, 75, 78, 80n12, 82, 84, 86, 90, 96, 103, 105–6, 109, 111–3, 116, 133, 146, 151–2, 156–8, 180–1, 183–6, 195, 213, 216, 220, 232–4, 251, 261–2, 273, 287, 290, 293, 309, 314, 326, 328, 332, 351–2, 354, 357, 361
 - perfectly free, 96–7, 114–6, 209
 - perfectly good, 1, 7, 12, 105, 115–6, 139, 151–2, 156–7, 191–2, 196, 202–3, 249, 256–7, 263, 273, 328
 - preeminent being, 123
 - self-sufficient, 2, 242, 244, 325
 - simple, 1, 2, 20–43, 45, 47, 51, 67–8, 71, 72, 80n12, 90–2, 110–14, 122, 127–8, 134–5, 138, 140–2, 148, 152, 154, 157, 158, 161–4, 166, 181, 184, 202, 219, 221, 259
 - sovereign, 1–2, 23, 26, 36, 46, 67, 70, 72, 82, 84, 96, 97–107, 145, 148, 156, 157–9, 164, 168, 187–8, 196, 201, 213, 218–21, 324–5

- God's Ubiquitous Meddlesomeness, 186–8
 Godhead, 24, 38, 46–7, 255
 grace, 13, 17, 124, 133, 168, 170, 241, 248,
 261–2, 289–90, 342–3, 353
 Great Chain of Being, 196, 206
 Great Chain of Value, 176–8
 Great Commandment(s), 231, 237–8
 greed, 237–8, 313–4
 gullibility, 10

 hard moral dilemma, 280–1
 hard *simpliciter* dilemma, 284
 hardening of hearts, 290
 Hare, Peter, 334n21
 harm not realized by victim, 326
 harm vs. offense, 293–4, 325–7, 331
 hatred of God, 202–3, 221
 having a reason vs. giving an explanation, 254
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 174, 209
 Herod's oath, 283–4
 highest seraph, 135, 137, 140
 Hinduism, 121n4
 historical dependency, 108
 holiness, 240
 Holt, Dennis C., 45n5
 Holy Spirit, 329, 359
 homicide, 274, 303–4, 306, 309–11
 hoodwinking God, 352–4
 hope, 2, 294, 336–7
 absent in Luther, 345–6, 356–8, 359, 361–2
 Aquinas on, 338–40, 341n9, 347, 358–62
 Augustine on, 337–9, 341
 Hospice World, 215–8
 human flourishing, 253, 261, 263
 human freedom, 2, 51–3, 83–5, 103, 107,
 170–5, 186n21, 188–91, 264–5
 human reason, 165, 168
 as discursive, 75, 111–2, 162
 Hume, David, 119, 129, 259

 ideas, 105–6, 134–5, 137, 139–40, 142, 148,
 204, 210
idion, 58–60, 63, 68–70, 71
 Illinois Supreme Court, 303–4
 immanence vs. transcendence, 119, 122, 124,
 127–8, 142
impossibile vs. *inconueniens*, 285
 impure love of God, 341
 inbeing, 120–2, 124n13
 incommensurable possible worlds, 214
 incommensurable values, 214, 216
 incompatibilism, 171–2
 inductive inferences, 48, 75, 111
 ineffability, 137, 142
 infinity, 2, 9, 29, 199–200, 242, 244–5, 254, 262,
 266, 294
 causal, 132
 of degrees, 9–12, 18n18
 numerical, 5
 of possible worlds, 88, 104, 116, 127, 148,
 205–7, 256–7
 spatial, 102, 127
 temporal, 102–3, 113
 innate knowledge, 74, 77
 instance-instance identities, 24–5, 28, 32, 35,
 38–9
 intending, distinct from willing, 48, 235–6,
 297
 intention, 48, 164, 193–4, 235–6, 241, 244,
 246–7, 262–4, 281, 296–7, 298–315, 326,
 351, 353, 357
 intentionalism, 296, 298, 304, 307–8
 interdefinability of 'obligatory' and 'permissible',
 150, 272
 interior prayer, 133
 internal senses, 131, 134
 internally specifiable virtues, 361
 intrinsic goods, 13–8
 intrinsic maximum, 6–12, 18–9, 30–2, 212–3
 Isaac, 69, 272n3, 273–4

 Jephthah, 269–71, 291–2, 294
 compared to Abraham, 273–5
 compared to Herod, 283–4
 Jephthah's vow, 269–70, 273–4, 277, 283–4,
 291–2
 Jesus, 139n39, 231–2, 246, 296, 336, 338n3
 John the Baptist, 283
 joint ventures, 189, 191, 331
 justice, 17, 22–3, 25, 105, 133, 195, 202, 204–5,
 219, 282–3, 305, 314, 318, 319–21, 327,
 329, 359
 justified true belief, 85

 Kant, Immanuel, 128–9, 174, 209, 237–8
 Kantianism, 228, 230
 Kenny, Anthony, 86, 171n3
 Kierkegaardian conflict, 272n3
 knowledge by acquaintance, 135–7
 knowledge by description, 136
 knowledge of contingent facts, 74–8, 86–8,
 89–90, 92, 109, 111–2
 knowledgeable, 7–10, 30–2, 36, 64, 170, 180,
 183, 186, 208, 213, 256, 330–1
 Kornblith, Hilary, vii
 Kretzmann, Norman, vii, 5n1, 154–5, 161,
 176n8, 177n9, 254n11, 328, 334n20
 Kripke, Saul, 212
 Kronos, 114

 Laplace's Demon, 75
 legal fictions, 305–6
 legal vs. moral culpability, 306
 Leibniz, Gottfried, 1–2, 5, 212, 214, 216–8, 221

- on possible worlds, 88, 103–4, 146, 148, 197–8
 - on rationalism, 204–5, 208–9, 255, 258–60
 - on space and time, 102
 - on the best possible world, 150, 204–8, 212–3, 256
- See also* principle of continuity, principle of sufficient reason
- Leibniz's counterfactual, 256–7
- Lewis, David, 197n2, 198n3, 256n17, 310n13
- libertarianism, 103, 171–3
- liberty of indifference, 161, 168–9, 171–3, 195
- liberty of rational optimality, 175–8, 195
- liberty of spontaneity, 171–3, 195
- limited possibilism, 147, 150, 160, 163
- linear ordering, 64, 209–10
- Locke, John, 109–10
- logical consequence, 75
- Lord's Prayer, 338
- love, 2, 48, 64, 66–7, 91, 130, 138–40, 153, 156–7, 165–6, 168, 194, 202–3, 204, 231, 236–49, 251–9, 261–2, 263–6, 273, 287, 294, 316, 318–22, 327, 328–335, 336–45, 346–9, 352–4, 356–62
- Lovejoy, Arthur O., 196, 199
- lovingkindness, 260–1
- Luther, Martin, 1, 337, 340–50, 352, 354–9, 361–2
- luthiers, 257, 261, 263
- lying, 278–9
 - conditions for, 298–300
 - test cases, 300–2
- MacDonald, Scott, vii
- Maimonides, Moses, 170
- malice, 359
- Mann, William E., 68n23, 223, 182n17, 249, 315n17, 329n13
- Martinich, A. P., 120n2, 121n6
- Mates, Benson, 146, 210n22
- Matthews, Gareth B., vii, 129n19
- Mavrodes, George, 11–2
- maximality condition, 66–7, 206, 212, 214
- memory, 90, 109–11, 112–4, 131, 134, 136, 170
- mens rea principle, 296–7, 304, 305–6
- mental states, 48, 109, 112, 343, 345
- mercy, 7n3, 12, 25, 42, 293–4, 314, 354, 358–9
- mereological sum, 37, 120
- metaphysical necessity, 104, 208
- metaphysical parts, 1, 126, 259
- minimalist account of love, 237–8
- miracles, 98
- miserliness, 257–8, 261
- modal logic, 13n13, 107, 147, 150–1, 163, 197, 216n36
- modal unrevisability, 163
- Model Penal Code, 310–1
- modularity of mind, 110–2
- monotheism, 227–8, 318
- moral appraisal, 287–8
- moral dilemmas
 - and logical inconsistency, 286–8
 - secundum quid*, 275–85, 289
 - simpliciter*, 276–7, 282, 284–5, 290
- moral educator, 166, 227, 231, 356
- moral guidance, 287–8
- moral legislator, 166
- moral monolemma, 288–90
- moral motivation, 130, 165, 168, 208, 227, 229–30, 231, 239, 242, 246, 248–9, 254, 260–2, 267, 305, 312–4, 331, 339, 341, 344, 346, 348–52, 355, 357
- moral necessitation, 208–9
- moral theory
 - analogy with scientific theory, 285–8
 - constraints on, 228–30, 248–9
- moral values, 164–8, 182, 187n23, 335
- Morris, Thomas V., vii, 167n3
- Murphy, Mark, 232–4
- mystical experience, 28, 133–42
- necessary coextensiveness, 32–6, 39, 42–3, 46, 60, 323
- necessary falsehoods, 104, 145–6, 149–50, 157–8, 187
- necessary identities, 22, 46, 60, 72
- necessary truths, 28, 80n12, 103–4, 105–6, 131, 146–51, 155–60, 163, 220
- Newton, Isaac, 102, 151
- Nicene Creed, 137, 138
- noninferential knowledge, 87–8, 136, 162
- normative ethical theory, 227–32, 236, 240, 248–9
- Normore, Calvin, 83
- Nuchelmans, Gabriel, 80n12
- numbers, 125, 148
- oaths, 282–4
- object-focusing, 243, 245, 247
- obligatory actions, 235, 271
- Ockham, William of, 202–3, 218
- offense vs. harm, 293–4, 325–7, 331
- Olympian deities, 317–8
- omnipotence. *See* God/omnipotent
- omnipresence. *See* God/omnipresent
- omniscience. *See* God/omniscient
- ontological argument, 5, 32, 38, 131
- Opera World, 215–8
 - Opera plus *Tosca* World, 216, 218
- optimizing, 208, 217, 262
- ordered love, 342
- original sin, 276, 355
- 'ought implies can'. *See* ability principle

- Pallas, 205
 panentheism, 119–22, 123n9, 124, 125–7
 Pangloss, 209
 pantheism, 119–24, 127, 138
 Paradox of the Stone, 11–2
 Pareto-improvement, 13–6
 Parmenides, 121n4
 Pascal's Wager, 352
 Pasnau, Robert, 131n24, 132n27
 passivity, 45, 192
 Paul, 135–6, 139, 336–7, 342, 343n13, 358–9, 361
 Pelagians, 289
 Penner, Terry, 318n4
People v. Fuller, 303n8
People v. Hickman, 303–4
 perceptual awareness, 109–10, 129
 perfect goodness, 19, 115, 139, 150, 152, 154–6, 203, 251, 256, 328
 Pereboom, Derk, vii
 perjury, 101, 275, 282–3
 permissibilism, 166
 perplexity. *See* moral dilemmas
perplexus, 278, 285
 personhood, conditions of, 47–8, 109
philia, 238, 241, 244–6, 249
 Philo, 1, 57–60, 67–9, 72
phthonos, 257
 physical necessity, 198
 physical parts, 1, 90, 126, 154
 Pieper, Josef, 358n31
 piety, 2, 316–8, 322–4, 327, 335
 and justice, 319–21, 327, 329
 filial, 98, 327–8
 natural, 329
 supernatural, 329–32, 334–5
 Pike, Nelson, 5n1, 133n29, 186n21
 Plantinga, Alvin, vii, 10, 20, 23n6, 24n8, 25–7, 32–6, 38, 146–7, 159n1, 265n27
 Plato, 95, 116, 125n14, 209, 240, 241, 253–4, 259, 265
 on creation, 96–8, 115
 on Forms, 105, 148, 241
 Meno, 324
 Protagoras, 318
 Republic, 239
 Symposium, 239–41
 Timaeus, 97–8, 196, 257
 See also Euthyphro
 Pope, Alexander, 209
 Pörn, Ingmar, 189n24
 Porphyry, 62–3, 65, 66
 possibility as conceivability, 147
 possible worlds, 13–8, 26–7, 32, 37, 79, 84, 87, 88, 89n18, 103–4, 114, 116, 127, 146–52, 157, 159, 196–8, 200–3, 205–18, 221, 248, 256–8, 261–8, 328
 Poulain, A., 133
 power vs. manifestations of power, 55
 practical knowledge, 80–2, 85–6, 88–9
 precognition, 74, 77
 predestined elect, 341–2, 348n20
 predicate synonymy theory of property identity, 33–5
 predication, theories of, 28–9, 31, 40n20, 57–8, 60, 67–8, 71, 123n9
 preemptive strike, 312
 presumption, 358–9
 presumption of innocence, 305–6
 pre-theoretical moral intuitions, 228, 248
 principle of continuity, 207n14, 209–11
 principle of epistemic compossibility, 8, 10
 principle of noncontradiction, 131, 256
 principle of sufficient reason, 211–2, 216, 256–7
 principle of utility, 215
 problem of evil, 99–101, 191–4, 264
 properties. *See* accidental properties, *idion*
 property identity, 33–5, 39
 property instances, 27–8, 36–8, 40–1
 propositions, 1–2
 and abstract objects, 79, 148
 pseudo-Dionysius, 139
 public safety, 305
 pure love, 340–2, 345–8, 352–3, 356–9, 361–2
 Pythagoreans, 128

 quantifier-shift fallacy, 289
 quantitative parts, 122–3, 126
 quietism, 346
 Quine, Willard Van Orman, 33n15, 104
 Quinn, Philip L., vii, 99, 166, 235–6, 246–7, 270n1, 272n3

 random choice, 177n9
 rational equipoise, 176–8, 209, 211, 216–7, 233
 rationalism, 174, 204, 213, 219, 255
 rationally optimal choices, 208
 Rawls, John, 13n12
 reasonable doubt, 305
 relativism, 156
 religious authority, 165
 repentance, 279, 281, 293–4, 359
 Rescher, Nicholas, 13nn11–12
 responsibility for sins, 170, 186n21,
 retrograde causation, 77
 revelation, 28, 105, 165, 231, 329, 358
 rich property, 38–9, 46–7
 rigid designator, 41, 87
 Rosenbaum, Stephen, 8n4
 Ross, James F., 18, 39–42, 182n17
 Russell, Bertrand, 136
 Ryle, Gilbert, 332–3

- salvation, 170, 262, 278, 289, 336–7, 340–3, 345, 348–9, 351–4, 357–60
- Sanford, David, 9n6
- Santurri, Edmund N., 279–80
- satisficing, 2, 260, 262–4
- Savage, Wade, 11–2
- Scanlon, T. M., 308n12
- self-awareness, 109–12, 244
- self-concern, 346–7
- self-control, 318, 321
- self-defense, criteria for, 312–4
- self-evidence, 131–2
- self-exclusiveness thesis, 338–40, 347
- self-hatred, 342–4, 346, 354–9, 362
- self-interest, 165, 242, 339, 346–7, 356
- self-involvement, 346
- self-love, 261n23, 337, 343–4, 346, 348, 356
- Sen, Amartya, 13nn11–12
- separability thesis, 202–3
- separation thesis, 259–60, 265
- seriality, 206, 214
- Sermon on the Mount, 296–7
- servants of God, 341
- set-extensional theory of property identity, 33–4
- Sharvy, Richard, 323
- Sherry, Patrick, 240
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter, 272n2, 288n21
- Slote, Michael A., 179n12
- Socrates, 153, 317–21, 322–5, 329, 335
- soft moral dilemma, 280–1
- soft *simpliciter* dilemma, 282
- soul's core, 134, 139
- souls, 125, 130, 209, 239
- space, absolute vs. relational, 101–2, 107
- speculative knowledge, 80–1, 85–6, 94
- Spinoza, Baruch, 95, 122n7, 174
- stability condition, 67, 71
- stare decisis, 304
- stipulative knowledge, 87–90
- strict criminal liability, 298, 302–4
- strong moral *n*-lemma, 271, 288
- structural dependency, 109–10
- Stump, Eleonore, vii, 50n13, 176n8, 177n9, 252nn2–3, 334n20, 343n15
- substantial change, 62–3
- substitutivity of definitional equivalents, 322–3
- supererogation, 16, 166, 234–6, 246, 342, 354–6
- superpictize, 332–4
- supervenience, 60, 69, 71, 200, 325, 334
- Swinburne, Richard, 345n16
- synchronic psychological states, 344–5, 350
- Tempier, Stephen, 190n25
- tempting God, 280
- Tertullian, 57, 68, 72
- theodicy, 128, 192–3, 195, 205, 211–2
- Theodorus, 205
- theological objectivism, 154–7, 316, 334–5
- theological subjectivism, 154–7, 316, 334–5
- theological virtues. *See* charity, faith, hope, piety
- theological voluntarism, 199, 201, 203, 273, 287
- thing-ontologies, 97
- Thomson, Judith Jarvis, 308n12
- tic-tac-toe, 275–6
- time, absolute vs. relational, 101–2, 107
- to hosion*, *see* piety
- transcendence, *see* immanence vs. transcendence
- Trinity, 20, 142, 330n14
- ubiquity, *see* omnipresence
- undoing, 347–8
- unfreedom, 115, 172n4, 178–80, 209
- universal decisiveness, 186
- universal possibilism, 146–50, 159–60
- universals, 125
- unmediated causal powers, 129
- uti* and *frui*, 341
- utilitarianism, 16, 228–9, 230, 240, 243
- Valla, Lorenzo, 205
- value structure, 15, 258
- Van Inwagen, Peter, 173n5
- Velleman, J. David, 252n2
- vice, 313–4
- virtues, 2, 318, 321, 358. *See also* theological virtues
- Vlastos, Gregory, 318n4
- Voltaire, 209
- Von Bismarck, Otto, 305
- Von Wright, Georg Henrik, 276n5
- vows, 282–4. *See also* Jephthah's vow
- vulnerability, 108–9, 241, 252–3, 261, 265–6
- weak moral *n*-lemma, 271
- weakness of will, 116
- Wierenga, Edward, 231
- Wilde, Oscar, 220
- Williams, Bernard, 299n3, 301–2
- willing, activity vs. content, 48, 53–4
- wintellekt, 260, 266
- wisdom, 21–3, 25–7, 31, 37, 70, 91, 139, 164, 201–2, 204, 207n15, 219, 239, 254, 273, 287, 318, 321
- Wolf, Susan, 178n11
- Wolfson, Henry Austryn, 60n8, 67n22
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas, 231
- Xenophanes, 95, 108, 111, 113
- Zeus, 108, 114, 318

